THE NEW REPUBLIC

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Idol Worship

How Evangelicals Duped Themselves about Bush

Alan Wolfe

+

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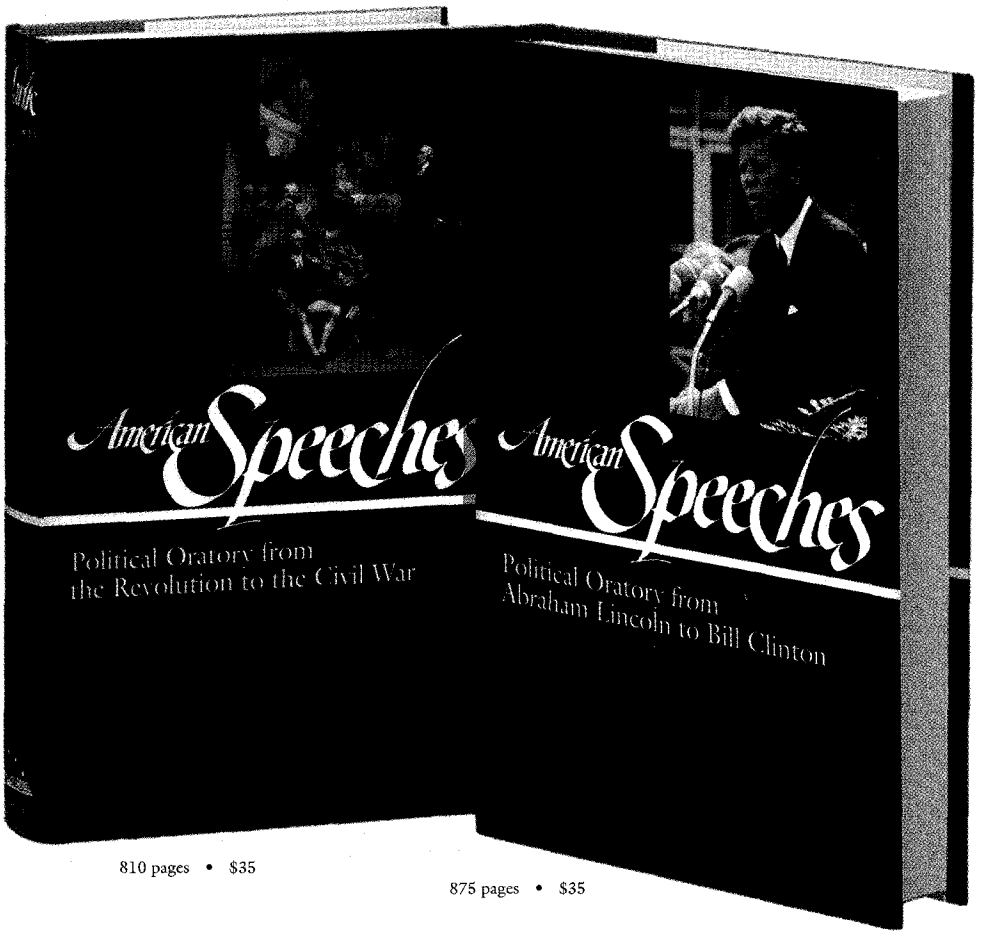
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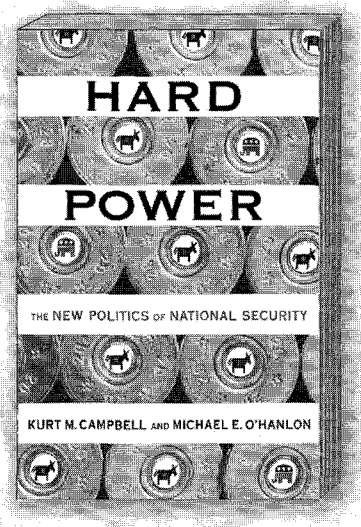

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BASIC BOOKS

CORRESPONDENCE

IT'S A MAN'S MAN'S MAN'S WORLD

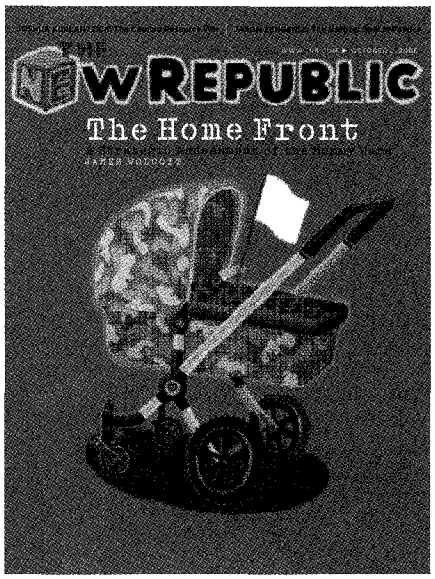
DURING THE THREE YEARS THAT I wrote and edited *Mommy Wars*, I had a lot of conversations with men that went like this:

Man: So, what are you working on these days?

Me: A book about working and stay-at-home moms.

Man: Huh, you could write a whole book about that?

So I was especially curious to see what a man (in this case, James Wolcott) thought of *Mommy Wars* ("Meow Mix," October 2). In his review, Wolcott described *Mommy Wars* as a "vanilla fudge of chatty banality and flat assertion." As a man with no children, he didn't exactly identify with the work/family struggles women tackle; but, surprisingly, he also could not appreciate the contributors' stories about universal problems facing women—cancer, domestic violence, children with special needs, postpartum depression, financial hardship, a mother's suicide, infertility, child abuse, and plain old lousy husbands—from a variety of smart, candid voices ranging from Pulitzer Prize–winning author Jane Smiley to "Lizzie McGuire" creator Terri Minsky to *Washington Post* reporter Lonnae O'Neal Parker. Lately, women have written a lot of books and articles and blogs about our work/family challenges—including the fact that many men seem astonishingly clueless about the reality of our daily lives as we search (often in vain) for the following: affordable, high-quality child care, jobs with enough flexibility so that we can pick up our children from school, employers who pay women and men equally, and husbands who don't expect



to get a medal for occasionally emptying the dishwasher. Wolcott's bafflement toward women writing honestly about their lives was fairly predictable—a track already well-worth by critics intent on deriding a female literary tradition that dares to deviate from such serious and important male subjects as fly-fishing, elephant-hunting, and keeping mistresses. What baffles me most is why a respected national magazine would trivialize the gut-wrenching conflicts facing women by using "Meow Mix" as a title. Readers deserve a reviewer who can identify with women's issues and a magazine that does not compare our struggles to cat food.

LESLIE MORGAN STEINER
Washington, D.C.

LIKE MANY OF THE WOMEN DEscribed in Wolcott's review, I am also trying to write while being a mother, with my laptop perched "on any flat surface." I worry over Linda R. Hirsh-

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man's claim that women who might otherwise have positions of authority are staying home and "have no power in the world." Yet full-time parents, like anyone who works with children, have an extraordinary power and responsibility: to shape the kind and educated citizens who will soon enough take care of us and all we've done and undone. Sometimes this means sacrificing one's own vocation for a while, or at least the energy to do it well. How pointed that John Hollander's villanelle "Policing the Yard" appears in the same issue, with its devastating refrain: "Picking up what they'd dropped too long before: / That will return to haunt them all the more." This is chilling to any of us who don't pay enough attention to parenting and equally so to a mother dusting off her C.V., assessing her skills, and attempting to reenter the workforce.

LESLIE WILLIAMS
Newton, Massachusetts

WOLCOTT'S ARTICLE ON THE SO-called mommy wars provides a clear case of the narcissism of small differences. There is no discernable difference in the well-being of children hand-raised by their mothers and those raised by mothers who work for pay. The real difference occurs when children are raised in poverty, suffer abuse, or are unwanted. It is regrettable that Caitlin Flanagan was upset by her mother's short foray into the world of work. But she has grown up to be a loving woman (according to herself) and one who obviously has enough self-confidence to broadcast her opinions. That's not such a bad development for the offspring of a mother who worked outside the home.

SHARI THURER
Boston, Massachusetts

POLE FAULT

IN THE EXCELLENT REVIEW BY Ruth Franklin of Jan T. Gross's book *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz*, she emphasizes the horrendous role that many Poles played in making life impossible as well as dangerous for Jews, both after the war and during it ("The Epilogue," October 2). The virulent anti-Semitism that infected Poland during the 1930s, even before the rise of Hitler, continued into the 1940s with extensive collaboration with the Nazis during the Holocaust. Unfortunately, this is a period that the current Polish government and its people have chosen for the most part to ignore, painting Poland purely as the victim during these periods and never as complicit in the perpetration of the Holocaust. Even to this day, it seems that whenever there is any mention of Polish guilt in the Holocaust or the massacres of Jews after the end of World War II, the Polish ambassador denies it with a flood of letters to the press. It would be of some comfort to the few survivors of the Holocaust and to the victims of the later murders of returning Jews if the representative of Poland in the United States would freely admit to the facts, instead of being in total denial.

NELSON MARANS
Silver Spring, Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

In "By the Horns," the newspaper that published editorial cartoons that led to Muslim violence is identified as Dutch. It is Danish. We regret the error.

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Going Native

TRB FROM WASHINGTON

WHO IS THE MOST LEFT-wing commentator on mainstream television? Keith Olbermann? Bill Maher? Not even close. I'm talking about a man who says both parties are "bought and paid for by corporate America," and calls lobbyists "arms dealers in the war on the middle class." This latter-day William Jennings Bryan denounces the "corporate supremacists" in Congress who write "consumer-crippling" bankruptcy laws, pass job-exporting free-trade deals, and raise the interest on college loans. He peppers his economic analyses with quotes from the labor-supported Economic Policy Institute. And he recently called the GOP's effort to link a minimum-wage hike to a repeal of the estate tax "obscene." I refer, of course, to Lou Dobbs.

The flaxen-haired ex-Republican, who used to host a boosterish business show, should be the answer to lefty dreams. For years, writers like Thomas Frank, author of *What's the Matter with Kansas*, have argued that what liberalism needs is a strong dose of populism. From Joseph McCarthy to George Wallace to Bill O'Reilly, the modern American right has defined itself against cultural elites. Liberals, Frank and others argue, must fight fire with fire: attacking economic elites with as much gusto as the populists of old.

That's exactly what Dobbs is doing. And it's working so well—Dobbs's ratings are up 33 percent in 2006—that some of his CNN colleagues are getting in on the act. A few weeks ago, curmudgeonly anchorman Jack Cafferty ventured that big oil companies were bringing down gas prices to help Republicans at the polls. To be sure, CNN still features Wolf Blitzer and other just-the-facts, straight-down-the-middle types. But Dobbs increasingly ranges across the entire network, venturing beyond his 6 p.m. slot as a talking head on other shows. And he is turning mild-mannered CNN into the closest thing the United States has to an anti-corporate network.

So why aren't liberals cheering? Because, for Dobbs, taking on corporate America means taking on corporate America's thirst for illegal-immigrant labor. Dobbs is downright obsessive about the issue, and he isn't above nativist scare-mongering—calling Mexican illegal immigrants an "army of invaders" who are bringing leprosy and malaria across the Rio Grande.

To some degree, the left's response has been to treat Dobbs as two different people. In August, in an article devoted to Dobbs's immigration rants, *The Nation* accused him of "hysteria and jingoism" and called him "McCarthyesque." By contrast, *Mother Jones*, in 2005, published a friendly interview with the man it called "mad as hell about offshore outsourcing and faith-based economics." And this April, an article in the lefty journal *In These Times*, which focused on Dobbs's opposition to the Dubai ports deal, declared that, in an era of journalistic meekness, his "in-your-face defiance is a welcome antidote, and may be the wave of the future."

It may indeed. Liberals may want to separate the good Dobbs from the bad, but, on the ground, Democratic politicians are increasingly embracing Dobbsism in full. From the industrial Midwest to the upper South, Democratic candidates are successfully wooing the white, working-class, often rural voters who deserted the party after September 11. And they're doing so by taking Dobbsian stances on both trade *and* immigration. In Ohio, Senate hopeful Sherrod Brown is author of a book titled *Myths of Free Trade*. In Tennessee, Harold Ford—formerly a free-trader—was one of the first candidates to demagogue the Dubai ports deal. In Virginia, Jim Webb has blamed free trade for the rising gap between rich and poor. But, in almost the same breath, many Democratic challengers are staking out immigration positions to President Bush's right. And Democratic incumbents are doing the same thing. As *The New York Times* has noted, 62 Democrats backed the House's enforcement-only immigration bill this September, up from 36 who supported a similarly tough bill last year. And, in the Senate, a large majority of Democrats just voted to build a fence along the Mexican border. As Democratic pollster Stan Greenberg recently told *The American Prospect*'s Harold Meyerson, the themes working best for Democrats this year among rural voters have "a strong nationalist component," particularly on "trade and immigration."

This rising economic nationalism is directly related to the demise of Bush's foreign policy nationalism. As his war on terrorism has collapsed politically, the GOP has lost its hold on the hawkish independents and Democrats who voted Republican in 2002 and 2004. It's a lot like the early '90s, when working-class Reagan Democrats and independents—bound to the GOP by shared anti-communism—broke free after the cold war's end and flocked to the economic nationalist candidacies of Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot.

For writers like Frank, the tragedy of that era was that the free-trading, Wall Street–friendly Bill Clinton did not use economic populism to permanently lure these angry white males into the Democratic fold. Now Democrats have another chance. But renouncing future NAFTAS won't be enough. Many liberals would like to pick and choose their anti-globalization politics—arguing for more regulation of international trade and investment, but resisting punitive measures to regulate the flow of international labor. Morally, that's perfectly defensible. But, politically, it is likely to fail. There is a reason that the late nineteenth-century populists Frank admires were nativists: While low-skilled immigration may benefit the United States as a whole, it rarely benefits low-skilled Americans. And, for many blue-collar Americans today, Mexican immigration—whether legal or not—is not just linked to broader anxieties about globalization; it has become the prime symbol of those anxieties. In the coming years, unless Democrats take a hard line on immigration, their hard line on trade is unlikely to do them much electoral good.

Economic nationalism may offer the Democratic Party its best chance in decades for an enduring reconciliation with the white working class. But if it happens it won't be pretty. If you embrace Lou Dobbs, you embrace him in full.

PETER BEINART

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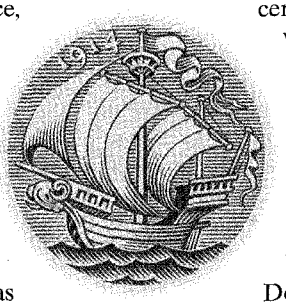
Ay, Caramba

WE APOLOGIZE FOR interrupting your fantasies about life after November 7 with a flashback to darker times. A preelection (and hopefully not premature) bout of schadenfreude has led us to revisit the height of the Karl Rove boom, that bygone era when President Bush's architect openly compared himself to Mark Hanna, the brains behind William McKinley and the Republican Realignment of 1896. Back when Rove regularly made this nerdy yet grandiose claim, he would wax lyrical about Latinos. Immigrants from south of the border weren't just socially conservative and entrepreneurial—huddled masses yearning to breathe free markets—they were destined to form the bedrock of Rove's implacable Republican majority.

If Rove still believes his old paeans to Latinos, he has one strange way of showing his admiration. Consider a few snippets from Republican campaign commercials now dogging channel surfers. In North Carolina, House candidate Vernon Robinson is airing a spot depicting a white man who gazes at a sign that reads, HELP WANTED: BI-LINGUAL ONLY! A narrator helpfully adds: "These illegal aliens pay no taxes but take our jobs and our government handouts, then spit in our face and burn our flags." Then, one Latino man grabs his crotch and another flips the camera a middle finger.

Down in Georgia, Republican incumbent Mac Collins has used similar material to bludgeon his opponent, Jim Marshall. More in sorrow than in anger, the ad intones, "Jim Marshall joined his liberal leader Nancy Pelosi and voted to waste our tax dollars printing election ballots in Spanish." It's a complaint interrupted by the villainous voice of a Mexican *bandido* sneering, "*Muchas gracias, Señor Jim Marshall.*"

Over on YouTube, you can uncover a vast archive of similarly classy GOP ads. The genre has several hallmarks: It evokes a fear of lawlessness and a sense of growing social decay; it impugns opponents with a lack of patriotism (MITCHELL AGAINST ENGLISH LANGUAGE, reads the bottom of the screen in one of Representative J.D. Hayworth's ads). And, in many ways, these spots are far cruder than the racial code words used by the GOP back when it relied on its vaunted post-segregation Southern strategy. But the connection between these ads and the old Willie Horton–style productions is clear enough. In 1990, for instance, Jesse Helms, seeking reelection against a black candidate, aired an ad that blared: "You needed that job, and you were the best qualified. But they had to give it to a minority because of a racial quota." While the target of Republican ads has shifted, the language remains nearly identical. "You needed that job, and you were the best qualified," Vernon Robinson's inflammatory ad announces, as the viewer witnesses a white woman cradling her head in her hands. "But they gave it to an illegal alien so they could pay him under the table."



It wasn't supposed to be like this. When he ran for president in 2000, George W. Bush implicitly promised that the era of Republican race-baiting was over. If compassionate conservatism meant anything, it was intended to exchange carefully calibrated attacks on welfare queens for a new Republican willingness to talk about the urban poor. But the true hallmark of the Bush ethos of tolerance was its political embrace of Latinos. Remember when *el presidente* blurted out Spanish phrases in nearly every stump appearance? For a time, he seemed to lead a devastating repudiation of California Governor Pete Wilson and his particularly virulent brand of immigrant bashing.

Of course, you can't completely fault Bush for the resurgence in his party of anti-Latino sentiments. For whatever it's worth, he has made a point of naming Latinos to high posts in his administration. And, far more importantly, he backed a plan that would have provided a pathway to legalization for millions of illegal immigrants—albeit a plan with significant flaws.

But the current moment raises serious doubts about his initial sincerity. Back in the late '90s, with a growing economy, there was hardly any price to be paid for encomiums to the immigrant spirit. The mood has obviously shifted—and not just thanks to demagogues like Pat Buchanan and Lou Dobbs. Renewed anxieties over globalization—and the corrosive atmosphere fostered by growing income inequality—have helped make piñatas out of border-crossers. In this climate, when the demands of partisan politics are in tension with his commitments to pluralism, Bush has shown hardly any willingness to stop the party he leads from spewing vile racism. *Muchas gracias, Señor Bush.* ■

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Deval Patrick, machine slayer.

Mass Appeal

BY JASON ZENGERLE

DEVAL PATRICK HAS never held elected office, but he's already won something that typically eludes even veteran politicians: The Seal of Broder. A few weeks ago, David Broder, the living embodiment of the political journalistic establishment devoted his *Washington Post* column to Patrick—hailing the Democratic Massachusetts gubernatorial candidate as a bona fide political star. Broder recounted the 50-year-old Patrick's remarkable life story: Raised on the rough South Side of Chicago, at the age of 14 he landed a scholarship to a prestigious New England prep school, which set him on a path that would take him to Harvard, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, a tony Boston law firm, the Clinton administration Justice Department, and the corporate boardrooms of Texaco and Coca-Cola before recently depositing him in Massachusetts politics. Broder then all but declared Patrick the winner of the election, which would make him Massachusetts's first black governor and the state's first Democratic governor in 16 years. Indeed, Broder predicted that the governorship would likely be but a way station for Patrick, who is "certain to be in demand by starry-eyed Democrats across the nation if he wins."

But Patrick wasn't able to enjoy the adulation. The day before Broder's valentine ran, *The Boston Globe* reported that, in the last eight years, Patrick had written two letters to the Massachusetts parole board seeking the release of Benjamin LaGuer, a convicted rapist serving a life sentence. The *Globe* subsequently reported that Patrick had helped pay for DNA tests LaGuer claimed would exonerate him (they didn't). "I have never met Mr. LaGuer in person," Patrick wrote in one letter. "But, thanks to a lively exchange of correspondence over the years, I do feel I know him. I receive a crushing volume of mail, much of it from prisoners in facilities all over this country. None of it is as thoughtful, insightful, eloquent, or humane as that I receive from Mr. LaGuer."

Before you could say "Willie Horton," the Massachusetts governor's race—which had been largely about issues like taxes and good government—was suddenly about crime. Patrick's Republican opponent, Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey, went on the attack. She cut an ominous TV ad that featured a woman walking in a dark parking garage while a narrator intoned, "Have you ever heard a woman compliment a rapist?" Suddenly, Patrick's lead went from 21 to 13 points. And he now faced the unappealing prospect of fighting the campaign's final weeks on terrain that is frequently unfavorable to Democratic politicians—black Democratic politicians in particular.

WHEN PATRICK LAUNCHED his gubernatorial bid 18 months ago, he was considered the longest of longshots. The Democratic nomination was, at the time, assumed to be the property of the man Patrick eventually trounced in the party primary in September—Tom Reilly, the sitting attorney general and a longstanding member of the state party's white ethnic political establishment. "Deval was completely unknown on a statewide basis. He had no campaign organization, and he had no serious financial base," says John Marttila, a Massachusetts political consultant who has been an informal adviser to Patrick's campaign. "I think most people thought it was a hopeless cause."

But two things Patrick did have going for him were personal magnetism and timing. A compact man with a thick neck and a bullet-shaped head, Patrick has a high, nasally voice; but the somewhat incongruous combination gives him a presence that is impressive without being intimidating. And, as Patrick traveled the state, meeting with small groups in library basements and living rooms, it wasn't long before he started generating considerable excitement in the Massachusetts Democratic Party's activist base—which was just beginning to emerge from its depression over John Kerry's defeat. "I think there was a critical mass of people who were very eager to get back up on the horse and take another run at achieving political change," says Ralph Whitehead, a professor of journalism at the University of Massachusetts. "Deval Patrick became the vehicle for their considerable political energy."

Although Patrick has staked out conventionally liberal positions on issues like taxes, gay marriage, and alternative energy, he has also appealed to moderate voters by emphasizing his corporate background. Perhaps most importantly, he has borrowed a page from the playbook Republican Mitt Romney used to win the governorship in 2002—cultivating an image as a pragmatic, results-oriented leader who stands outside Massachusetts's dysfunctional political establishment. "The failure of the Big Dig," Patrick declared, shortly after a tunnel collapsed in the infamous public infrastructure project in July, "is a failure of politics-as-usual. It is the failure of leaders to do the jobs they were elected to do. The Big Dig culture of Beacon Hill allowed corners to be cut and oversight to be lax."

Patrick has taken a similarly pragmatic approach to the issue of race. In some respects, his race has been an undeniable political asset. "Deval represents a chance for people in Massachusetts to feel good about themselves when it comes to race relations," says Dan Payne, a Boston political consultant who used to work on the Patrick campaign. But Patrick has been exceedingly careful not to overplay this political advantage, lest it turn into a political liability. In September, when Massachusetts Democratic Party Chairman Phil Johnston accused Healey of coming "perilously close to race-baiting" by raising immigration issues, Patrick immediately distanced himself from the comments, telling reporters that "Phil Johnston speaks for himself." As Scott

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Harshbarger, a former Massachusetts attorney general and current Patrick adviser, explains, "It's a very conscious strategy not to raise the race issue."

NOWHERE HAS THIS strategy been more evident than in Patrick's response to Healey's charge that he's soft on crime. While some of Patrick's supporters have complained that there are racial undertones to Healey's attacks—particularly as they relate to LaGuer, who is black—the candidate himself has steadfastly refused to play the race card. And, at a campaign event on a recent Saturday afternoon in Melrose—a bedroom community about ten miles outside of Boston—he showed why he doesn't need to.

Although it was a beautiful fall day, several hundred people had packed into Melrose's Memorial Hall to hear Patrick speak—and many of those in attendance were anxious about their candidate's shrinking lead in the polls. "He's got to stop the bleeding," a middle-aged white woman told me. As he paced on a small stage set up in the middle of the hall, Patrick tried to reassure his supporters, arguing that Healey's attacks were a sign of her desperation. "When you think about all of the attacks and all of the negative ads and all of the mean-spiritedness that you've been hearing on the airwaves and on talk radio and maybe at conversations at work," he said, "all of that is about changing the subject—anything but talk about their record. And, if I had their record, I'd want to change the subject, too."

But then, after making this predictable—if true—argument, Patrick did something that Democrats branded as "soft on crime" seldom do: He faced the attacks head-on. "You know what? Let's talk about crime; we ought to talk about crime," he said, his voice rising. "I'm the only one in this race who's actually ever sent anyone to prison," he practically shouted, getting in a plug for his own experience as a prosecutor. "Let's talk about crime," he continued. "I've been a victim of crime. You can't grow up in a place like the South Side of Chicago, with crime all around you, without understanding the impact—on families, on communities—of crime. I don't need to be lectured to about crime." And then, having established his tough-on-crime bona fides, Patrick did one final pivot. "But I'll tell you one other thing. I have occasionally stood up in favor and in support of the unsavory defendant, and you should be glad somebody does. That's what makes the American legal system a just system."

Thanks to impressive performances like this one, Patrick has now regained the lead he enjoyed—and then some—before the LaGuer story broke. It's far too early to hail Patrick as the next big thing in Democratic politics; after all, it's not as if the national party hasn't had enough bad experiences with Massachusetts liberals. But, if Patrick manages to end 16 years of Republican control of the Massachusetts governor's office—while confronting an issue that all too often leads to GOP victories—then that will be achievement enough. ■

Let the hearings begin!

Subpoena Envy

BY MICHAEL CROWLEY

'AS THE Lord High Executioner said in *The Mikado*, 'I have a little list.'" So says John Dingell, the 26-term Michigan House Democrat who spent 14 years as a mighty committee baron before the 1995 Republican Revolution booted him into the powerless minority. At last poised to reclaim his House Energy and Commerce Committee gavel, the 80-year-old Dingell now sounds like a man who can't wait for 2007. Though he knows a House Democratic majority won't pass much legislation, especially given George W. Bush's veto pen, his chairmanship means he can subject the Bush administration to high-profile committee hearings—lots and lots of them.

"Privacy," he begins. "Social Security–number protection. Outsourcing protection. Unfair trade practices. Currency manipulation. Air quality. We'll look at the implementation of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. We'll take a look at climate change. We'll take a look at [the Department of Energy's] nuclear waste program, where literally billions of dollars are being dissipated. We'll look at port security and nuclear smuggling, where there's literally nothing being done. We'll look at the Superfund program. We'll take a look at EPA enforcement." He pauses for a breath—but he's just getting started: "On health, we'll take a look at Medicaid and waivers. The Food and Drug Administration. Generic drug approval. Medical safety. We'll also take a look at food supplements, where people are being killed. We will look at Medicare Part D [prescription drugs]." Is that all? "Telecom. We'll look at FCC actions. ... Media ownership. Adequate spectrum for police, fire, public safety, and addressing the problems of terrorism. ... We will look also at the overall question of Katrina recovery efforts."

As Democrats have gained in the polls, Republicans are predicting that a Democratic majority will mean a frenzy of political witch hunts directed at them by newly installed chairmen like Dingell. "You can expect two years of all-out investigations and attacks and anything they can bring to bear," Newt Gingrich warned on Fox News last March. Clearly aiming to calm the hysteria, George H.W. Bush recently warned it would be a "ghastly thing" for the United States if "wild Democrats" were put in charge of congressional committees. A *Washington Times* article fretted that "key administration officials will be so busy preparing for testimony that they will not be able to do their jobs."

But the curious thing about Dingell's little list is that it targets policies—not people. While some Democrats may dream of hauling Karl Rove to the Hill to discuss Plame-

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gate or forcing Dan Bartlett to testify about Dick Cheney's hunting accident, Dingell is one of a number of future Democratic chairs who plan to focus on substance, not sideshows. And, as strange as it sounds, this may not come as a relief to Republicans. The GOP would love nothing more than for Democrats to go off on half-cocked, mean-spirited inquisitions that generate sympathy for the hapless Bushies. Alas, the GOP's conduct during the Clinton years has provided Democrats with a near-perfect what-not-to-do manual.

IN THE FALL of 1994, Gingrich could barely contain his excitement about the prospects of a GOP Congress. In remarks to a group of lobbyists (later leaked), Gingrich crowed that "Washington just can't imagine a world in which Republicans would have subpoena power." True to Gingrich's word, the following year the GOP in effect laid a siege-by-subpoena upon the White House. But Gingrich's world wasn't so wonderful: Republicans throughout Congress pushed anti-Clinton charges flimsy enough to embarrass a Soviet-bloc secret police agent. In the Senate, Al D'Amato conducted dozens of Whitewater hearings that flopped badly and contributed to his 1998 defeat by Chuck Schumer.

Most memorable, however, was the famously unhinged chairman of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, Indiana Republican Dan Burton. During his tenure, Burton issued more than 1,000 subpoenas to 141 different Clintonites. His inquiries included ten days of hearings on whether the White House used its Christmas card list for political purposes. In one case, Burton's investigators managed to subpoena the wrong man. His low point came in 1998, when Burton released misleadingly edited transcripts of secretly recorded phone conversations conducted in prison by former Clinton associate Webb Hubbell. Burton apologized, and his notorious lead investigator, David Bossie, resigned; but, by then, fellow Republicans were furious over the damage Burton had done to his own party. "There were a lot of self-inflicted wounds," one Republican fumed to *The Washington Post*.

Burton wasn't alone. In 1997, Republican Representative Gerald Solomon of New York notified the FBI that Democratic National Committee fund-raiser John Huang may have sold U.S. secrets to the Chinese, prompting an FBI investigation and wide press coverage. Two years later, FBI files released to Congress showed that Solomon's charge had been based on a cocktail-party conversation with a Senate staffer who claimed to have heard the scoop from an unnamed employee of the Commerce Department, where Huang had worked. Solomon couldn't remember his source's name—only that he was "a male in his thirties or early forties, approximately five feet ten inches tall with brownish hair." (That narrowed things down to roughly half the federal government's employees.) As Henry Waxman, currently the ranking Democrat on the House Reform Committee, put it at an American University forum last month, "That's the climate we were in then: Even cocktail-party gossip could launch major congressional and criminal investigations of the Democratic Clinton administration."

WAXMAN, WHO HOUNDED the Reagan and first Bush White Houses as chairman of a subcommittee on health and the environment, now finds himself in the same place as did Dan Burton in 1994. Over the past few years, he has sought—and been denied—investigations into whether the administration possibly condoned detainee abuse at Abu Ghraib or Guantánamo Bay, tightened executive-branch secrecy, permitted the politicization of science, and bungled pre-war WMD intelligence. But now, after six years of being sidelined, Waxman suddenly looms as one of the Democrats' most important figures. As chairman of the Government Reform Committee, traditionally a lead investigative committee, he'd be sure to run some of a House Democratic majority's most dramatic and news-making hearings.

Waxman is surely just as giddy as Burton was to be taking the reins of power, newly able to make any member of the opposing party answer his beck and call. (In a potentially bitter irony for the GOP, Waxman says he'll retain an enhanced subpoena power that Republicans granted to Burton over Democratic objections—even though Waxman insists the use of subpoenas is a last resort.) But it's obvious that he has learned well from the countless pratfalls of the Gingrich Republicans. "In 1994, it was clear that Newt Gingrich had the intention of payback. I think the Republicans have given us a very good example over the past twelve years of how not to behave, and we ought to learn from that," Waxman explains, sitting in his Capitol Hill office in a maroon sweater.

Waxman's careful study of the GOP's overreach during the Clinton years is not the only reason that Republicans should be afraid. Though he represents a California district that includes West Hollywood's Chateau Marmont and Malibu Beach, Waxman—with his bald, oval head, large ears, and glasses—is anything but a shoot-from-the-hip proxy for buffoonish Hollywood celebrities. "He's not a hack. He's really well-respected in the caucus," says a House Democratic leadership aide. "Henry is a great prosecutor," says New Jersey Democrat Rob Andrews. (Democrats particularly respect Waxman's staff, led by his hard-driven chief of staff, Phil Schiliro, who retains a near-ency-

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clopedic memory of Burton's foibles.)

When it comes to specific plans, Waxman is more coy than the verbose Dingell. "One of my priorities will be to pursue waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayers' money," he explains, citing Hurricane Katrina, homeland security, and Iraq as potential examples. What remains unclear is how intensely Democrats like Waxman intend to pursue the politics of the Iraq war. Hard-core Democrats would surely love nothing more than to see Donald Rumsfeld, Doug Feith, and Paul Wolfowitz sweating under the klieg lights as they explain the basis of their case for war. Waxman seems to shy away from the idea of reliving the fall of 2002 and spring of 2003. "That would have been an appropriate hearing to have," he says, conspicuously employing the past tense. "I think the manipulation of intelligence with the war was a very serious matter that should have been pursued in open hearings." Does that mean the moment for such hearings has passed? "I don't know what the issues will be," Waxman explains with a smile.

Chances are that the case for war won't be one of them. One leadership aide acknowledges that some House liberals are eager for hearings on whether Bush officials lied about Iraq, but they are unlikely to get their wish. "I don't think there'll be a lot of that," says the aide. Adds another leadership aide: "We're looking to really change the tone and look like we're making things work—and that, when we're doing oversight, it's with good reason. It's not about political vendettas; it's about making sure things are working and taxpayer dollars are being spent right."

There's already evidence of such self-discipline. Several months ago, Michigan Democrat John Conyers, who is set to take over the House Judiciary Committee, was publicly musing about the possibility of Bush's impeachment. But Nancy Pelosi clamped down on such talk, and, for the most part, Conyers seems to have abandoned any such ambitions. "I'm sure that we will occasionally present some of our more screechy, paranoid members, and it won't be to our advantage," says Democratic strategist Jim Jordan. "But I think, over the past several years, you've seen a great deal of discipline and maturity from the House [Democratic] political leadership. Certainly, Nancy Pelosi doesn't have any interest in confirming House Republican accusations about her" as a left-wing Gingrich. And, for every Conyers in the House, there's a shrewd Barney Frank (Financial Services Committee), David Obey (Appropriations), or Ike Skelton (Armed Services).

All this prudence may disappoint the party's frothing liberal base, which might like to see, say, Steven Hadley in stocks—preferably with his pants down. But, in fact, it's surely more alarming to a Bush administration whose best hope for survival, if Democrats win the House, will be that Dingell, Waxman, and company go on a Burton-esque rampage. Asked whether the Bush White House should dread the specter of his chairmanship, Waxman smiles and gives a little shrug. "I'm a nice guy," he says. That's exactly what George W. Bush is afraid of. ■

A junket to remember.

Cost Qatar

BY GARANCE FRANKE-RUTA

In April 2003, shortly after the U.S. military took Baghdad, Connecticut Representative Christopher Shays disregarded Pentagon warnings and joined an aid convoy, organized by the Connecticut-based charity Save the Children, as it drove from Kuwait into Iraq. From the Iraqi border city of Umm Qasr, Shays was able to stake a claim to being the first American congressman to cross the border after the U.S. invasion. His brief day-trip won him a fawning interview on CNN upon his return and remains an important part of his biography. In an election season where polls show a Democratic wave building by the day, Shays is currently in a fight for his political life against Democrat and Westport Selectwoman Diane Farrell. As one of the most vulnerable House Republicans, the unapologetically hawkish Shays often returns to his 14 trips to Iraq. "It was the weirdest thing," he told *The Hartford Courant*'s *NE Magazine* of his initial visit in June. "I felt like I was trying to break out of jail getting into Iraq."

But, while Shays may want his constituents to know about his first—and most daring—trip to Iraq, he apparently doesn't want them to know how he got there. Shays's moment of triumph in Iraq came about because he happened to already be in the Middle East—attending the third Qatar-American Conference on Free Markets and Democracy in the tiny oil-rich nation of Qatar. Shays's visit was paid for by The Islamic Free Market Institute, a nonprofit group founded by GOP ally Grover Norquist and run by a protégé of disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff to help bring Muslims into the Republican fold. Days before he snuck across the border to cheer on Operation Iraqi Freedom, Shays was at the Doha Ritz Carlton, comparing Connecticut, a centuries-old, economically diverse democracy, to Qatar, a monarchy ruled by a single family since its independence in 1971. "This nation, like my small state, has always played a large role in advancing participatory democracy, civil discourse, and stable commerce," Shays told a well-heeled audience of Qatari politicians and businessmen over lunch.

Shays has been a strong advocate for public-disclosure rules over the years. "As public servants, we have a responsibility to uphold the ethics process, not weaken it," he told *The Houston Chronicle* in 2005, objecting to an effort to defang House ethics rules in the wake of revelations about Tom DeLay's overseas travels and ties to Abramoff. Those travel rules require members of Congress to file

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forms revealing all travel expenses paid by outside sources. But, despite his record of pushing for meticulous record-keeping, Shays's privately sponsored trip to Qatar was notably absent from his own annual federal financial disclosure form, filed in May 2004, in violation of House rules. Nor did he submit an amendment disclosing the sponsor of his Qatar trip until confronted in mid-October 2006 by THE NEW REPUBLIC with internal Islamic Institute receipts for his plane tickets, which were provided by an Arab American source upset with Shays's foreign policy positions. Given his reputation and perennially contested district, it was a particularly foolhardy move.

SHAYS WAS ONE of a dozen members of Congress to attend the conference in Qatar. U.S. Central Command was headquartered out of Doha, and the trip offered an opportunity for congressmen to visit it after the conference wound down, garnering favorable press back home. Shays got official approval for the trip in March from Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis, who requested that federal funds for the trip "be made available." That made Shays completely authorized to travel on the government's dime—but he chose not to do so. Instead, when his aides filed his overseas itinerary with the Department of State, they noted that "Shays' airfare will be paid for by the Islamic Institute" and that the "Islamic Institute will pay for Rep. Shays' expenses while in Doha." Shays made that choice, says his aide Nick Palarino, "in order to try to save the government some money."

According to an April 3, 2003, receipt, Shays and his wife were booked by the Islamic Institute's travel agency, Skyway Travel Inc., on first-class, round-trip tickets that were to take them from Washington to Frankfurt, Germany, and then on Qatar Airways to Doha, where they were to arrive on the evening of April 12. Shays's wife ultimately decided against the trip, which came just two days after U.S. forces took Baghdad. But Shays left the United States as planned—although, at the last minute, he chose not to use a portion of the Islamic Institute's post-conference ticketing that would have brought him via Jordan to Israel and the West Bank. Instead, he traveled on a U.S. government ticket to Kuwait and then into Iraq, the part of the trip that his constituents hear much more about, before continuing on to Israel.

Shays filed a travel disclosure form in 2003 with the House Clerk, listing the Islamic Free Market Institute Foundation/University of Qatar as his sponsor for the trip and including such miraculous bargains as twelve days of lodging for just $600. But forms filed with the House Clerk are difficult for the public to access, compared with personal financial disclosure forms, which watchdog groups post online. "You can only go to the House to look up these records," explains James Benton, director of government affairs at Common Cause. "You can't look them up online. If an outside group investigates these records, it requires a huge research effort to find them."

And, despite the fact that Shays boasted to *The Stamford Advocate* in 2003, "Every expense of my office is a matter of public record," Shays never listed the Qatar trip on his personal financial disclosure form. A first inquiry from this reporter in early October 2006 prompted his chief of staff, Betsy Hawkings, to find "a subcommittee trip that needed to be disclosed." (Subcommittee trips are generally paid for by the federal government.) A quick letter of amendment for this trip, which had been partially funded by a Norwegian source, was drafted on October 13, 2006. Asked specifically about the Qatar conference, Hawkings said: "I was told that was a subcommittee trip." Pressed again, this time with the Islamic Institute's receipts, Hawkings admitted the truth: Shays had flown to Qatar and back to the United States on the Islamic Institute's dime, and his meals and hotel in Qatar had been paid for by the Islamic Institute. Shays returned the unused portion of his tickets and those booked for his wife. "It was authorized as official travel," said Hawkings. "Just so there's no question, I'm going to file another amendment."

THE DANGER OF nondisclosure is that the true source of funding for foreign travel becomes untraceable. In Shays's case, knowing who sponsors his travel is especially pertinent; Shays chairs a congressional subcommittee overseeing U.S. national security matters. Just as Abramoff's nonprofit front groups routinely acted as thinly veiled conduits for money from his lobbying clients, the Islamic Institute's outlays for the representative's travels were rapidly reimbursed by the trip's real sponsor: Qatar. (In fact, Khaled Saffuri, the chairman of the Islamic Institute, had close ties to Abramoff and some of his foreign clients and had set up a short-lived lobbying firm, the Lexington Group, with him in 2002.) A letter from Saffuri to His Excellency Badar Al Dafa, then the Qatari ambassador to the United States, and a reply from the foreign ministry of Qatar shows that the Islamic Institute sought and received $143,150.93 from the foreign ministry days before Shays boarded the plane to Doha—and that the money was requested by Saffuri as reimbursement for, among other things, the congressman's travel.

Shays's aides sounded winded by this revelation. The Constitution prohibits members of Congress from taking funds from foreign governments or their agents. "What they did to get reimbursed wouldn't be anything we had any knowledge of," said Hawkings. Republicans have frequently seemed wary of getting too close to Qatar, the sponsor of Al Jazeera and an increasingly important advocate for the Palestinian side of the Arab-Israeli conflict. When Abramoff tried to help Saffuri get the foreign minister of Qatar a meeting with Karl Rove in 2001, according to recently released e-mails, Rove nixed the idea. Other Republicans have been similarly cautious about their dealings with Arab states, and Hawkings eagerly pointed to Shays's "speech criticizing Wahabbism, given in Qatar," to prove that he's no softie when it comes to the war on terrorism. But perhaps the best way for Shays to have done that would have been to disclose his free stay at the Doha Ritz-Carlton. ■

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Counterterrorism as pulp.

Novel Approach

BY MARISA KATZ

THE YEAR IS 2020. A young Muslim preacher has been proclaimed the new caliph, attracting a worldwide following that includes the daughter of an American senator. Civil wars and insurgencies rage throughout the Muslim world and beyond. Muslim athletes at the Olympics declare loyalty to the caliphate over their own nations. Histories of previous caliphates soar on Amazon's best-seller list.

A dystopian novel's potboiler plot? Not exactly. The scenario comes from a global trends estimate by the National Intelligence Council, a government advisory group. But, if it sounds more like best-selling fiction than sober policy analysis, the similarity isn't a coincidence. Ever since former White House terrorism czar Richard Clarke revealed that he looked to Tom Clancy novels for insight and the 9/11 Commission declared that the government's cardinal sin amounted to a "failure of imagination," Washington has been busy trying to stimulate creative thinking about security threats. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and various consulting firms have invited everyone from government officials and academics to thriller writers and self-proclaimed "futurists" to imagine themselves into the shoes of America's adversaries. While novelists have been treated like policy experts, policy experts have been encouraged to get in touch with their inner novelists. As a result, fictional scenes from inside Al Qaeda have become increasingly common features of counterterrorism analysis.

These creative gyrations have generally enjoyed a positive reception. Interviewing novelist–turned–security-adviser Brad Meltzer on CNN, Lou Dobbs exclaimed, "I think a lot of people, including myself, are surprised to hear that the government has the intelligence, the sense, to turn to creative artists like you." And James Fallows, writing recently in *The Atlantic*, legitimized the creative approach by interweaving excerpts from fictional Al Qaeda accounts with real quotes from convicted terrorists. Certainly all this imagining is tremendous fun—or, at least, more fun than writing and reading policy briefs. But it's not necessarily a smart way to fight terrorism.

POLICYMAKERS HAVE STRUGGLED to get inside the heads of their enemies as far back as ancient Rome, when Tacitus imagined a speech that the British tribal leader Calgacus might have given to rally his troops. In the modern era, the Prussian army is credited with creating the concept of *kriegspiel*, or wargaming, which, in its initial iterations, allowed officers to test battle plans by moving model armies across maps. Wargaming was imported to the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century. For a long time, it remained a predominantly military activity, often with domestic forces represented by a blue team and enemy forces by a red one. In the 1960s, however, businesses—most prominently Shell oil—began using similar methods to plan for future uncertainties. And, in the 1980s, the entire enterprise took on a countercultural gloss, as business leaders enlisted artists, scientists, and academics to help craft their predictions.

But, since September 11, 2001, the practice has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity. Our adversaries, the thinking goes, are tougher to understand and predict than in conflicts past. During the cold war, for instance, it was relatively easy to gauge Soviet intentions and capabilities. Not only did we have better human intelligence, but there was a visible political-military apparatus to watch. We could see their missiles and know which ones were pointed at us. Beyond Pentagon red teams that tried to anticipate Soviet responses to U.S. moves, there wasn't much need to speculate about the Soviet mind. Radical Islam, by contrast, is a much shadier world. Although jihadists are prolific communicators, issuing videotapes and conversing in Internet chatrooms, it's difficult to tap into the mind-sets and motives behind the propaganda. So policymakers have increasingly turned to fiction as a way to better understand the enemy, as well as to shake up the intelligence system and fill in knowledge gaps. As Jon Nowick, director of the DHS's red team program, told *The Washington Post*, "We paint a picture where there are no dots to connect." Or, in the more colorful language of the National Intelligence Council's Robert Hutchings: "[L]inear analysis will get you a much-changed caterpillar, but it won't get you a butterfly. For that, you need a leap of imagination."

Thanks to this line of thinking, people like Meltzer are in demand. Meltzer has six novels, three comic books, and the cancelled drama series "Jack & Bobby" to his name. His latest thriller, *Book of Fate*, currently holds the number-ten spot on the *New York Times* best-seller list. It's about a presidential assassination attempt, the Masons, and a 200-year-old code invented by Thomas Jefferson. *The Washington Post* noted this month that Meltzer's strengths include "rock-'em sock-'em action and conspiracy tales that begin tamely enough and vault into the realm of breathless improbability."

In 2004, he got a call from DHS. "They said, 'We'd love to have you come in to brainstorm different ways for terrorists to attack us,' " he recalls. And so he found himself ensconced with dry-erase boards and croissants in a Virginia conference room, teamed up with a chemist, a psychologist, a Secret Service officer, and some intelligence types, and assigned a mission. "They'd say, 'Here's your target. How would you attack?' " he explains. "Then I would come up with the craziest idea I could come up with. And the Secret Service guy would say, 'No, here's where we should do this because here's the security flaw.' And the chemist would say,

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'You don't want to use that chemical, because it dissipates in the air.' " Minus the dry-erase boards and croissants, Meltzer imagines terrorists sitting around doing the same thing.

BUT THAT MAY be giving them too much credit. One problem with these kinds of exercises is that they assume a level of organization and strategy that may not exist. Fawaz Gerges, a professor at Sarah Lawrence College and author of *Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy*, says his interviews with convicted terrorists reveal a surprising lack of strategic sophistication. For example, he notes, an Egyptian extremist imprisoned for playing a principal role in the assassination of Anwar Sadat was more than ready to admit how "amateurish the whole thing was—that it was a miracle that they pulled it off, how unprepared they were for the confrontation that subsequently unfolded." Marc Sageman, whose book *Understanding Terror Networks* was called "the most sophisticated analysis of global jihadis yet published" by *The New York Review of Books* last December, agrees. The core members of Al Qaeda, he explains, "may have a strategic vision, but they're not connected with the rest of the people, who are self-generated, self-organized." It's possible to strategize as your enemy would when it's one military analyzing another and there's a fixed chain of command. Terrorism, though, is not like that. The bumbling, the spontaneity, the role of chance aren't easily captured by red-teaming.

Moreover, when creative thinking isn't creative enough, it can be a waste of time. This category includes a mock Al Qaeda briefing that Mike Scheurer—the former head of the CIA's Osama bin Laden unit and author of *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror*—presents at military conferences. On energy policy, for instance, Scheurer's jihadist character riffs:

> This is unbelievable, Brothers, but three decades after Saudi King Faisal's blessed 1973 embargo, U.S. leaders are unwilling to install an energy policy that would remove Arab domination of their economy. ... And oh the irony, Brothers Osama and Ayman [Al Zawahiri], American parents are now paying exorbitant prices at the pump, and we are receiving a portion of those windfall profits to help us kill their soldier children in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. Truly, God is great.

Scheurer's Al Qaeda operative reasons suspiciously like a liberal American senator—or maybe Thomas Friedman.

The biggest danger, however, isn't that a lack of creativity will produce bad fiction; it's that an excess of creativity will yield unrealistic scenarios. Sageman has taken to disdainfully turning down red-teaming invitations because he says they tend to fall into this trap. "People involved in these exercises usually have overactive imaginations," he says. Former Clinton National Security Council staffer Steve Simon, now at the Council on Foreign Relations, concurs. "These exercises are like Rorschach tests," he says. "Somebody shows you a blot, and you project onto it all your anxieties and all your fevered dreams and fears." This points to a logical flaw in the idea that the less we understand about our enemies, the more we should use our imagination. In fact, the fewer facts we have to work with, the more likely it is that our imagination will take us in the wrong direction. And there's a real possibility that wrong direction will attract the attention of policymakers and draw resources away from bigger risks.

Indeed, all this focus on imagination may already have distracted us from the real problem. Contrary to the 9/11 Commission's criticism, a number of officials proved up to the task of imagining September 11. Scheurer begins *Imperial Hubris* by declaring, "Not only was the scale of the 11 September attack imaginable, but ... U.S. intelligence officers—often at the risk of their lives—had spent most of a decade gathering and analyzing the intelligence that, had it been used fully and honestly, would have allowed all U.S. leaders and, indeed, all Americans to know what sort of storm was approaching." In other words, maybe instead of indulging our imaginations, we should simply be paying closer attention to reality. ■

Dr. Kissinger's therapy.

The Unrealist

BY RICK PERLSTEIN

FOR ALL ITS mind-blowing details of administration ineptitude, Bob Woodward's third installment in his *Bush at War* trilogy hardly tells you much that you didn't already know. Of course George W. Bush lacks intellectual curiosity. Of course Donald Rumsfeld is a villain for the ages. But there's one particular revelation in the book that stands out for its plain weirdness: Henry Kissinger's presence in the Oval Office. According to Woodward, Bush treats Kissinger "almost like a member of the family," free to visit as he pleases.

It's strange to see him welcomed like a wise old uncle, because an entire generation of conservatives consider Kissinger an incarnation of Beelzebub. And that's a sentiment you would imagine the current administration feels even more deeply. "Kissingerian realism," after all, is the exact opposite of President Bush's "freedom agenda." It eschews gauzy sentimentalities like "freedom" in favor of global equilibrium and stability. But now, Woodward tells us, Bush and Kissinger have made common cause. On his surreptitious visits, Kissinger preaches the president a

Rick Perlstein's book NIXONLAND: THE POLITICS AND CULTURE OF THE AMERICAN BERSERK, 1965-1972, *will be published next year.*

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spine-stiffening gospel, imploring him to stay the course in Iraq. "Don't give an inch," Kissinger is said to have advised, "or else the media, the Congress, and the American culture of avoiding hardship will walk you back."

Woodward isn't a noted skeptic and he certainly doesn't apply any skepticism to the descriptions of Kissinger's visits—even though they come courtesy of noted truth-teller Dick Cheney. Kissinger, however, is one of history's greatest Machiavellians, a master manipulator of presidents, the press, and the people. His statements, even about the weather, require parsing for double and triple meanings—and particularly when they suggest strategy for failed wars.

TO BEGIN UNRAVELING the true meaning of Kissinger's advice to the White House, we have to go back to August 3, 1972. On that date, President Nixon repeated to the good doctor, his national security adviser, what he'd been saying in private since 1966: America's war aim (standing up a pro-American and anti-Communist South Vietnamese government in Saigon) was a fantasy. "South Vietnam probably can never even survive anyway," the president sighed. But a presidential election was coming up. He had long before promised he was removing the U.S. presence, more-or-less victoriously (though "victory" was a word Nixon, by then, wisely avoided; instead, he called it "peace with honor").

It was Kissinger, who had been shuttling back and forth to Paris for peace negotiations with the enemy, who named the dilemma: "We've got to find some formula that holds the thing together a year or two, after which—after a year, Mr. President, Vietnam will be a backwater. If we settle it, say, this October, by January '74, no one will give a damn." Thus was confirmed what historians would come to call the "decent interval" strategy. Having pledged to Saigon—and American conservatives—that Communist troops would not be allowed in South Vietnam after a peace deal was signed, Kissinger negotiated the opposite. "Peace is at hand," he announced on the eve of the 1972 presidential election, in one of his rare appearances before the TV cameras. The United States left the following spring; the Communists moved in; Saigon fell.

That's not how Nixon and Kissinger told the story, of course. They blamed the defeat on a combination of the liberal congressmen who refused to vote for continued aid to South Vietnam in 1974 and Saigon's own unfortunate lack of will. And, just as Kissinger had privately predicted, no one gave a damn. You might not associate Kissinger with withdrawal, because that's not how he has retold events. "While history never repeats itself directly," he wrote in his book, *Ending the Vietnam War*, "there is at least one lesson to be learned from the tragedy described in these pages: that America must never again permit its promise to be overwhelmed by its divisions."

If Kissinger wasn't truly a stay-the-course man in Vietnam but just sold himself to posterity as one, is it possible that the sorcerer is teaching his new apprentice the same trick—how to end a war with a retreat and blame it on anyone but himself? That's not very hard to imagine. A growing body of data suggests that the Bush administration is edging ever closer to withdrawal. We have heard strong hints that the president will make one last desperate stand—pacifying militia-filled Baghdad, convening an international conference, dividing Iraq into three semi-autonomous regions—before finally departing. James Baker's Iraq Study Group will likely be recommending some variation of this to the White House after the November elections.

You can almost hear the famous thick German accent: "Mr. President, you have to find some formula that holds the thing together a year or two—after which, Mr. President, Iraq will be a backwater." Maybe that is just what Henry Kissinger is advising: Something like a tripartite Iraq could be Bush's "decent interval" strategy, removing his own responsibility for the ultimate collapse in the eyes of posterity, parceling out the onus for failure between the Iraqis themselves and the American liberals who tied his hands. You can almost hear the president sighing in return, with a newfound, world-weary sense of realism: "Might as well. Iraq probably can never even survive anyway."

HENRY KISSINGER IS a conniver. His defining trait is not anything so honorable as an intellectual doctrine. It is his ability to command the empyrean heights of power through sinuous flattery, to seduce the ascendant powers at any given moment into attaching themselves to him, from John F. Kennedy to Nelson Rockefeller—and now George W. Bush and Dick Cheney. That is the soul of Kissingerian realism. It has even included an interval in the 1980s, when, *plus royalist que le roi*, he courted the neoconservative maximalists by excoriating the same brand of arms control deal with the Soviets that he himself had initiated.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Bush, the ur-"freedom agenda" sentimentalist, ended up (in words Woodward attributes to Cheney) "a big fan" of Kissinger. And, in the passages Woodward attributes to Kissinger in *State of Denial*, you can see how he insinuated himself: with a masterful understanding of Bush's psychology. The passages that leap out are the ones that serve to salve an imperiled sense of presidential masculinity in the face of failure: "For Kissinger, the overriding lesson of Vietnam is to stick it out"; "Even entertaining the idea of withdrawing any troops could create momentum for an exit that was less than victory"; "Kissinger claimed that the United States had essentially won the war in 1972, only to lose it because of weakened resolve"—the weakened resolve of others.

At least, that's what the book reports Kissinger told Bush. What Kissinger truly has to offer Bush, I fear, is not strategy but therapy. Or, as it were, therapy as strategy. He teaches Bush how to see himself in the future, as an old man: as a future prophet without honor. It doesn't feel so bad, Bush can tell himself: Kissinger, after all, has an open door to the White House. ■

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Were Clintonites wrong about the economy?

Freakoutonomics

BY JONATHAN CHAIT

In 1993, mere months into the Clinton era, the new administration went to war with itself. Liberals in the Cabinet argued that the central problem of the U.S. economy was the vast middle class that was not seeing its income improve—a problem, they said, that could only be addressed through massive public investment. Moderates, including Robert Rubin, then the chairman of the National Economic Council, replied that the central problem was restoring economic growth, which could only come about by slashing the budget deficit. The moderates won. Their triumph was chronicled memorably in Bob Woodward's *The Agenda* and bitterly mourned in *Locked in the Cabinet*, the memoir of liberal Labor Secretary Robert Reich. President Clinton's first major economic address "mentions education, and job skills," lamented Reich, "but the real heart of the message is the importance of reducing the deficit."

By the end of the Clinton years, the centrist ideology that emerged victorious from this skirmish came to be known as "Rubinomics," a moniker that took hold after Rubin was elevated to Treasury secretary and became the ideology's most prominent advocate. This economic vision encompassed several elements: fiscal responsibility married to controlled progressive investment, a belief in the importance of cultivating Wall Street's confidence, and a suspicion of populism. But, at its deepest level, it reflected an assumption that economic growth could be harnessed to the benefit of all Americans, not just the rich.

When Clinton left office, the Rubinites looked like prophets. Everything they hoped for had come true. Businesses invested more. Incomes grew, and not just for the rich. Families at the middle of the income distribution saw their incomes grow by more than $7,000. The poverty rate fell by one-quarter, and the typical black family saw its income grow by one-third. Even in the early Bush years, the victory of Rubinomics within the Democratic Party seemed complete. Democrats arguing against George W. Bush's tax cuts insisted that they preferred to use the money not on social spending but on debt-reduction.

Today, however, the Rubinites have been thrown into doubt. It is not that their policies have failed. (They have been abandoned: Clinton's economic policies meant fiscal responsibility combined with downward redistribution, while Bush has embraced fiscal irresponsibility and upward redistribution.) Rather, what has been shaken is something even deeper: their faith in the possibilities of economic growth.

The cause of their doubt is the disturbing performance of the U.S. economy over the last five years. What's happening is very simple: The economy is growing smartly, but, essentially, all the gains are going to the rich. It is almost a dystopian Marxist vision come to life. Corporate profits have soared, incomes at the very top have shot through the stratosphere, and, yet, the vast majority of Americans have not seen their living standards rise at all. This development does not offer much of an intellectual challenge to either the right (which is not particularly troubled) or the left (which is not particularly surprised). But the center is both troubled and surprised. And, for the Rubinites, figuring out just why this is happening, and what to do about it, has begun to unravel their confidence in the moderate remedies that not long ago seemed unassailable.

For 25 years after World War II, widespread prosperity was a bedrock assumption among liberals. The Port Huron Statement, issued by the Students for a Democratic Society in 1962, famously began, "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort. . . ." There was good reason for such economic optimism: From 1947 to 1973, the median family income more than doubled. And so, with the middle class flourishing, economic liberalism concerned itself with the plight of those left behind—inner-city minorities, the rural poor, and so on. Since the economic pie was growing on its own, liberals' chief concern was ensuring it was divvied up fairly.

But, starting with the oil price shock of 1973, the spectacular postwar boom ground to a halt. For the next two decades, living standards barely rose at all. Wages would grow during an expansion, but only enough to recapture the ground that had been lost during the previous recession. (This period was neatly captured by the title of Paul Krugman's 1990 book on the subject, *The Age of Diminished Expectations*.) The reason everything went bad all at once could be boiled down to a single word: productivity. Productivity, which is a measure of how much workers produce per hour, is the essential ingredient for higher material living standards. After all, the two ways to create more wealth are to work more hours or to be more productive in the hours we work—whether through technological advances, improved skills, organizational streamlining, or whatever. Since the number of hours in a day is finite—and, anyway, few people want to spend every waking hour slaving away—the only way for a society to enjoy greater material comfort over the long run is to increase productivity. As Krugman wrote, "Productivity isn't everything, but in the long run, it is almost everything."

During the postwar boom, productivity surged at an av-

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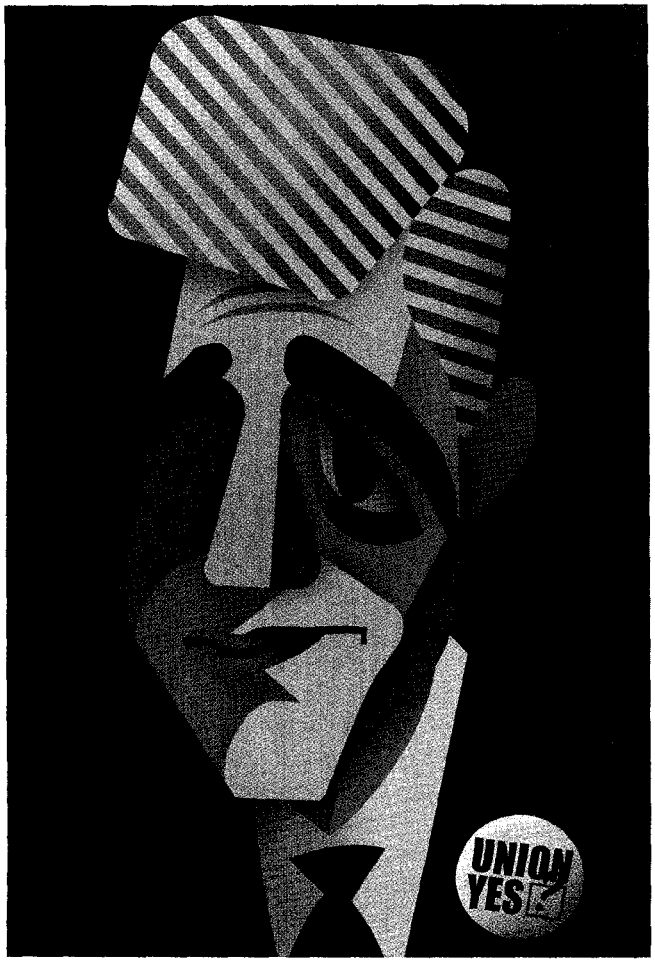
erage rate of 2.5 percent a year. But from 1973 to 1995, by contrast, it grew at a paltry 1.5 percent. The economic pie had stopped growing, and slicing it up more fairly was no longer enough. So a generation of liberals, and especially moderate liberals, began focusing on how to restore rising productivity and get the pie growing again. This was one reason the Clinton administration made it a priority to reduce the budget deficit, which drained savings that could otherwise be tapped by business for investments in new plants and equipment that could raise productivity. "The whole focus was on growth," Rubin recalled in an interview with *The Nation*'s William Greider last June. The focus on growth worked. Starting in 1995, productivity began to climb rapidly once again. And, just as they had after World War II, wages rose up and down the income ladder.

This is what has made the current economic expansion—which began after the brief 2001 recession—such a mystery. On one level, it resembles the expansion of the '90s—high growth, high productivity gains, low unemployment. But, on another level, it resembles the Age of Diminished Expectations: The median income has not grown at all. Workers are helping create enormous fortunes, but not sharing in them. The average hourly wage has actually declined 2 percent since 2003. The crisis of scarcity has been solved, only to be replaced by a crisis of maldistribution.



DAVID COWLES

THIS SEEMS TO run in the face of economic theory. If workers grow more productive, logic suggests, they're making more money for their employers, which means businesses will find it profitable to hire more of them. The more workers get hired, the more businesses have to bid up their price to hire them, which means that their wages will rise. Yet that final step is not happening. The vast new wealth being created by U.S. business is going to owners of capital and nobody else.

In a widely noted 2005 paper, Northwestern economists Robert Gordon and Ian Dew-Becker concluded that, for some time now, productivity gains have gone entirely to the top one-tenth of the workforce. "A basic tenet of economic science is that productivity growth is the source of growth in real income per capita," they wrote. "But our results raise doubts, that we find surprising and even shocking, about the validity of that ancient economic paradigm." Ever since the Gordon and Dew-Becker paper, economists—especially those on the left—have been obsessed with the phenomenon, discussing it in the mystified tones astronomers might use for a previously undetected black hole in our region of space. "Part of the answer is, we don't really know," confesses Peter Orszag, a former Clinton economic adviser.

The full weight of what is happening, in other words, has not yet sunk in. Before the current expansion, it had always seemed to be the case that growth translated into higher living standards for most workers. For that reason, those who follow the economy had, understandably, gotten into the habit of treating top-line economic numbers as a good gauge of broader economic health. Since the current state of affairs (with rapid growth sitting alongside stagnant incomes for most workers) is so unprecedented, economic journalists have had little idea how to treat it. The general reaction has been to puzzle at the public's sour disposition. A recent story in the *Associated Press* is typical:

> Overall, the economy grew at a 2.6 percent pace from April through June, compared with a 5.6 percent pace over the first three months of the year, which was the strongest spurt in 2½ years. Still, voters remain uneasy even though gasoline prices have started dropping, the stock market is hitting record highs, and interest rates on credit cards and adjustable mortgages are leveling off.

Just this week, *The New York Times* published a story on the front page of the business section marveling at voters' inexplicably downbeat assessment of the economy. "Republican candidates do not seem to be getting any traction from the glowing economic statistics with midterm elections just two weeks away," reported the *Times*. The author proceeded to puzzle at length about why this could be, without ever considering the possibility that, for most people, the economy was *not* doing well.

Conservatives, for their part, have grown enraged that the public does not adequately appreciate the economic bounty it is enjoying under Bush. *The Wall Street Journal*

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editorial page dubbed the current recovery the "Dangerfield economy" (meaning it gets "no respect") and speculated that people only believe the economy is bad because they have been fed misleading reports by the biased liberal press. Columnist George F. Will has fulminated against the "economic hypochondria" of the ungrateful masses. Conservative commentator Larry Kudlow has endlessly touted the Bush boom as "the greatest story never told."

It is certainly true that the economy is performing well by traditional standards. But it ought to be apparent that, in this case, traditional standards are not the most relevant ones. Fast economic growth, after all, is a means to an end—namely, higher living standards for most people. By any decent moral calculation, an economy that does not produce higher living standards for most people is not a good one.

THE MOST OBVIOUS mystery is: Why is this happening now? What makes this economic cycle so different from the ones that came before it?

One convenient answer is that Bill Clinton was president during the last expansion, and George W. Bush is president during this one. It's an appealing theory for Democrats. The problem is that nobody can point to any specific policies Bush has put into place that could have had such a massive effect. Bush's tax cuts—which disproportionately benefit the rich—have, of course, aggravated the situation. But the change that economists have trouble explaining is what's happening to *before-tax* incomes. Bush simply hasn't done enough to account for the huge difference between this economy and the Clinton economy. "I wish I could say Bill Clinton was the reason everything was better in the 1990s," Jason Furman, a Clinton economic adviser, confessed to me. Alas, he conceded, it's not true.

Some economists point out that the unemployment rate is deceptively low: If you look at other measures, like the share of the population who are not working (a measure that takes into account retirees and people not actively looking for work), you can see that the job market is not quite as tight as it seems. There's also the fact that rising health care costs have gobbled up some of the money that should be going to wages. But none of these factors explain all, or even most, of the huge gap between productivity and wages.

And so, in setting about to unravel the mystery, economists (especially those on the center left) have looked closely at a deeper trend, one that has been going on much longer than the current administration: rising inequality. Although the post-1973 decline in productivity growth was long considered the primary economic problem facing the nation, lurking in the background was a more or less concurrent trend of widening inequality. Put simply, the fortunes of the very rich and the fortunes of everybody else have been diverging sharply. Over the last quarter century, the portion of the national income accruing to the richest 1 percent of Americans has doubled. The share going to the richest one-tenth of 1 percent has tripled, and the share going to the richest one-hundredth of 1 percent has quadrupled.

During the last half of the Clinton administration, the issue of inequality receded somewhat. In part, this was due to the particularly beneficent conditions of the moment. With workers of all income levels enjoying rising incomes, the fact that some workers enjoyed higher gains than others seemed less crucial. In light of present circumstances, though, the 1990s boom seems more like a fluke. We enjoyed cheap gasoline, peace and prosperity, and a temporary lull in rising health care costs, thanks to the spread of health maintenance organizations. Operating under near-perfect conditions, the job market heated up and workers reaped the benefit. In retrospect, those halcyon days seem like more of a historical blip—one that temporarily obscured the massive, continuing undertow of rising inequality.

THERE IS A second reason that inequality has commanded renewed attention in recent years. The more we learn about its causes, the more pernicious it seems, and the more it seems to require radical solutions.

For a long time, economists have had a hard time pinning down why the rich have pulled so far away from the rest of us. The leading theory initially put forward by economists was something called "skill-biased technological change." The theory, in a nutshell, is that the development of new technologies, especially computers, has made mental skills more important. In the old industrial economy, there was high demand for brawn, which pumped up the wages of blue-collar workers. The new economy puts a premium on education. Therefore, the theory goes, workers with college educations have thrived, and those without have suffered. It's a nice theory, and one that seems intuitively correct. It also vindicates the basic free-market model, in which rising wages for those at the top are simply a natural reflection of their rising relative economic value.

But confounding evidence has piled up in recent years. First, Europe, which is exposed to the same changes in global trade and technology, has not seen anything like the increase in inequality found in the United States. Second, the salaries of those workers who ought to be best positioned to gain from technological change have not risen much at all. From 1989 to 1997, occupations related to math and computer science saw only modest income growth (4.8 percent), while the income of engineers actually dropped slightly. During that time, however, CEO compensation doubled. Third, the whole pattern of rising inequality does not suggest a split between the educated and the uneducated. The rise in inequality isn't between the top one-fifth and everybody else; it's between the top one-hundredth and everybody else. As a matter of fact, over the last five years, college graduates have watched their wages drop, while high school graduates' wages have held steady.

If the skill-biased technological change theory were true, then the answer to rising inequality would be to make your workers more skilled. That is exactly what the Clinton

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administration did, devoting billions of dollars to re-train blue-collar workers in the hope of making them more competitive for the global economy. And, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, that continues to be the Bush administration's answer to inequality. Whenever economists associated with the administration are asked about the rising gap between the very rich and the not very rich, they inevitably cite skill-biased technological change, offer up some anodyne musings about the need for education, and quickly change the subject.

If, on the other hand, you reject the theory of skill-biased technological change, you are left with an altogether more discomfiting explanation. Rising inequality must not be the logical outcome of the free market, the invisible hand working its magic. Instead, it must reflect the rising social, economic, or political power of the rich.

Economists, especially those on the center left, have lately been paying renewed attention to explanations for rising inequality that center around the lack of bargaining power for labor. First, the purchasing power of the minimum wage has withered away, reducing wages for workers at or near the bottom. In the late '70s, when inequality first began to explode, a minimum-wage worker made well over one-third as much per hour as the average worker. That figure has crept slowly lower and is currently less than 25 percent. Second, labor unions have shriveled. Less than 8 percent of the private-sector workforce belongs to a union, down from more than 20 percent three decades ago. And, third, globalization has thrown much of the workforce into competition with low-paid overseas labor.

These last two factors represent *terra nueva* for the Rubinites. Until recently, the ideological fissure between the economic left and the center left has always been over the question of at what point the government should step in to redress inequality. Moderates—that is, policy types associated with the Clinton administration, the Brookings Institution, or most university economics departments—believe that the market is generally the most efficient mechanism for distributing wealth. Government should redress inequality, but it should usually do so only after the fact—let the market work, then tax the rich and use some of the proceeds to help the poor. Moderate liberals have historically been restrained in their enthusiasm for the minimum wage and unions, and they have been downright hostile to any limits on international trade.

Economists from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party (those associated with labor unions, say, or groups like the Economic Policy Institute) have always attacked the moderates' prescriptions as naïve. If the rich control a growing share of the national income, they will turn their financial power into political power to protect their holdings. Untrammeled economic inequality will inevitably lock itself into place as the rich buy political influence and propagate policies that safeguard their wealth. And so, the liberals have always argued, government must foster greater levels of equality *before* the fact, not merely after.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the Rubinites have acceded to the labor-liberal worldview. But there are a lot of straws in the wind. Take Alan Blinder, a Princeton economist. Blinder is the very embodiment of technocratic moderate liberalism. He is a former governor at the Federal Reserve and a confirmed critic of economic populism. Yet, last spring, Blinder wrote a much-discussed essay in *Foreign Affairs* predicting that tens of millions of U.S. jobs could be outsourced in the coming years and pondering the potentially devastating implications.

The Democratic Leadership Council—once thought of as labor's arch-foe within the Democratic Party—has embraced the idea of a "card-check" system to make it easier for workers to form unions. And moderate liberal economists have, in sundry ways, tempered their enthusiasm for free trade with deeper worries about the dislocating effects of trade. A recent paper by the Hamilton Project, a Rubin-led group that is ground zero for former Clintonite economists, offered up a far more measured endorsement of free trade than would have been on display a dozen years ago, conceding, "International trade also has slightly exacerbated the underlying trend in the United States to greater income inequality and increased levels of income volatility." Former Clinton economic adviser Gene Sperling wrote last year that his fellow moderates should admit that "accelerated market opening in nations with weak safety nets and poor labor rights can at least temporarily exacerbate inequity." More anecdotally, Jared Bernstein, a liberal economist with the Economic Policy Institute, told me that the Hamilton Project requested 20 copies of his latest book.

Even Rubin himself has begun saying some highly un-Rubin-like things. In his interview with *The Nation* last summer, he mused about the "global convergence of wages"—a favorite phrase of labor liberals that refers to the ways global trade can bring down incomes for unskilled workers in advanced economies. He cited John Kenneth Galbraith's observation that a true labor market does not exist when business acquires too much power in setting wages. He brought up the idea again, unprompted, in an interview with me. "I'm not sure where that leads you," he admitted.

I'm not sure either, but the overall direction seems clear. Since the outset of the Clinton administration, the party's economic populist wing has been on the defensive. Democrats have fought against the most plutocratic and fiscally irresponsible Republican plans, but they have done so from a standpoint of resolute centrism. They had strong confidence in an economic model that was, at its core, conservative: unfettered free trade, fiscal restraint. They believed these ideas would benefit all Americans, and they did. But something has changed in the way the U.S. economy works. And, even if it's not yet entirely clear what has happened or how we can best address it, the intellectual balance of power in Democratic circles is already shifting. Today, all the confidence is on the populist side, and it is the centrists who aren't quite sure what to make of the world around them. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Degrees of Self

AT LAST WE HAVE A SURE way to see if the spirit world really exists. If we tilt upward and hear high-pitched glee, then we know it does, because what we are hearing is Truman Capote. Two films have been made about him, and both are released within about a year. No matter how greedy he was for attention, both serious and superficial, he could never have foreseen this bonanza. Listen: giggles seem to tinkle from the clouds.

INFAMOUS
(Warner Independent)

CLIMATES
(Zeitgeist)

The new film is called **INFAMOUS**. Douglas McGrath, who at one time wrote for this magazine, derived the screenplay from George Plimpton's sound-bite biography. (*Capote* was based on Gerald Clarke's biography.) The story of TC 2 is inevitably much the same as that of TC 1: Capote reads of the quadruple murders in Kansas and embarks on the assignment that leads to *In Cold Blood*, with Kansas squareness and Manhattan chic interwoven along the way. McGrath, who made *Emma*, also directed—fluently—and cast his picture acutely, with Toby Jones as Capote, Daniel Craig as Perry Smith (the more shadowed of the two killers), and Sandra Bullock as Harper Lee. The bevy of New York socialites with whom Capote buzzed to prove that he had made good—Sigourney Weaver, Juliet Stevenson, and Isabella Rossellini among them—are certainly buzzable with.

Possibly because of these women, McGrath says that he considers his film to be lighter in tone than TC 1, which is baffling. The reverse seems the case. McGrath summons much deeper emotion in Capote's visits to Perry's cell, and he gets more disgust out of the eventual hangings. (The earlier film sent William Shawn, the *New Yorker* editor, with Capote to the executions; this film sends Capote's publisher Bennett Cerf, inappropriately played by Peter Bogdanovich. In fact it was neither of these men: Capote was accompanied by his editor at Random House, Joe Fox.) Jones, who has the advantage of being small, is no more subtle or intelligent than Philip Seymour Hoffman was, and though Bullock is pleasant as Harper Lee, Catherine Keener seemed more believable as a writer.

But two extrinsic factors shove aside analysis of the film. First, the simultaneity. The producers of TC 2 knew that TC 1 was in process. Why did they go ahead anyway? Did they believe that an immense Capote audience was hungering for two films about him? How were the actors in TC 2 affected by the knowledge that another cast was working on the same characters? In 1936 two Broadway productions of *Hamlet* were prepared simultaneously, and there was chat about the espionage of one on the other. But that doubleness was fascinating, not redundant, because of the subject. Not quite the case here.

Second is the matter that bothered me, apart from the overrated prose, when I reviewed Capote's book forty years ago—and again when TC 1 came along. Capote's self. The title *In Cold Blood* has more than one meaning for me. Capote waited five years after he finished the bulk of his book because it couldn't be concluded until the convicts' appeals were exhausted and they were sentenced either to life or to death. During that five-year wait, Capote said to a friend about his book, "But it can't be published until they're executed, so I can hardly wait." If that was only a cynical joke, it is even worse. The murderers were executed in April 1965; *In Cold Blood* was published early in 1966 with tremendous success. In November of that year, with Katharine Graham as his ostensible honoree, Capote celebrated his success with an extravagant costume ball at the Plaza Hotel.

Somehow, that last item fits.

A Turkish film called **CLIMATES** confirms that two matters, once thought to be limited to certain parts of the world, are now international. The first of these matters is parochial to film—cinematography. Nowadays, in most film-making countries, cinematography is at such a high level that in a way we are getting spoiled—we simply expect it to be fine. (The improvement lessens our enjoyment of many once-hallowed films of the past.) Gökhan Tiryaki, who shot *Climates*, tells us from the first moment that, whatever else may be true thereafter, this film is going to be a treat for the eye. We soon see that the point is not pictorial beauty, although it is always before us. Tiryaki photographs the theme, not just persons and places.

The second global element is that theme. It is no longer social news that a certain separation from joy—a lack of reliance on matters that might bring forth joy—is now endemic in much of the world. This malaise of self did not originate with World War II, but it has certainly expanded since 1945, notably in literature, theater, and film. (I haven't read the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, who was lately awarded the Nobel, but I gather that his work lives in this atmosphere.) *Climates* is not even the first Turkish film to tell us that Istanbul is, in that sense, part of the West, but the experienced writer-director Nuri Bilge Ceylan never explains his characters' spiritual state. He simply assumes that we will understand.

Ceylan also plays the leading male role and shows quickly that he is a valuable screen actor of a certain kind—a presence as much as a performer, whose being verifies what he says and what he doesn't say. Ceylan's wife, Ebru Ceylan, who here plays his girlfriend, has a good deal of this quality; but, partly because of her role and also because of an evident temperament, she has other qualities as well.

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Ceylan plays a university teacher; she is the art director of a television series. On holiday at a seaside resort, they make their way through the ruins of ancient temples, moving like abstracted visitors through these monuments of faith. Time becomes almost visual in the way that Ceylan handles the pace of this sequence—so suggestively, almost oppressively, that we are not surprised to learn that this pair has reached the end of their relationship. Next day they part, with a kind of relief. Sustained passion, it is implied, is the province of old poetry, not of modern lives.

The rest of *Climates* is about Ceylan's journey through solitude to a return to a former girlfriend, then to—in a surge that surprises him—an attempted reunion with the first woman. Much of this journey consists of cinematized thought and self-investigation. The chief overt action in the picture is his virtual rape of the second woman, though the sex becomes consensual. This episode is deliberately ripped out of the film's quiet texture; it is credible precisely because it is so strange. In the final sequence of the film, Ceylan follows his first lover to a wintry mountain location, where her television show is being made. Reunion is not glib. In the last shot he faces us alone as snow falls around him. He disappears: the snow remains. A dog barks.

It is fair to ask if *Climates* would be as effective if it were set in a country from which we expect films of this tenor. Admittedly, the setting does heighten interest, but this film is much more than an ideational travelogue. Like all good art, it evokes a supranational affinity. And there is an unsurprising paradox: this drama of personal uncertainties is lodged in a certainty of form. ■

Alan Wolfe

The God That Never Failed

A golden age of credulity, in politics and in religion.

TEMPTING FAITH: AN INSIDE STORY OF POLITICAL SEDUCTION
By David Kuo
(Free Press, 283 pp., $25)

I.

TEMPTING FAITH IS THE story of how David Kuo, an unassuming if ambitious young man, discovered the wonder-filled joy flowing from devotion to a force more powerful than himself. I don't mean that he found God, although Kuo, by his own account, first encountered Jesus in high school. When Kuo tells us how he got "hooked," the object of his reverence lived not in Nazareth, but in Austin. "He seemed not just charming, but weighty, seductive yet pure, likeable but mysterious," he writes of his first meeting with then-governor George W. Bush. "I couldn't tell whether his disclosures were private revelations to someone he liked or just part of a pitch to someone he might need. I didn't much care. I loved him."

Neither theological brilliance nor grace-earning humility on the governor's part caused Kuo to succumb. It was all about the bottle. "Watching him, I couldn't miss the evidence of the former drunk, the lost soul who had fallen to his knees sobbing before God; the sinner who had become God's own." For Kuo, being a Christian means sharing your journey. "When Christians like me share the stories of how we came to believe in Jesus and what his presence means in our lives," he writes, "it is called a testimony. It is deeply personal, deeply intimate, and shared with fellow Christians as well as with those we hope are open to accepting Jesus." Bush's testimony—how he lost his way, how Billy Graham pointed him in the right direction—established his sincerity. My goodness, Kuo goes on, you just had to see the man when his path crossed with that of an addict. "Any swagger disappeared. Something softer and perhaps more genuine took its place. He listened to each story and nodded. He seemed more like a counselor than a politician. When this happened—just a few times I was around—he didn't hurry and didn't rush. It was one of the more Christ-like things I have ever seen a powerful man do." This is Noonanism with a born-again face. For Kuo, Karl Rove is "nice" and has "a soft heart," Karen Hughes is filled with "sensitivity," and even Dick Cheney has "a surprising jocularity." Surprising, indeed.

THE HOOPLA SURROUNDING Kuo's book focuses on his tell-all tidbits about what the insiders in the Bush administration really thought about all those crazy Christians who happened to make Bush president. These believers, Kuo tells us, were seduced by power. They put aside their religious ideals—especially the elusive truth that Jesus speaks to deeper and more permanent things than tax cuts and tariffs—in return for trinkets: presidential paperweights that they could show their friends, or, for the most influential souls, private meetings in the Oval Office. In so doing, says the penitent Kuo, they got their priorities all wrong. They should have ranked spirit and family over political power. Because they did not, they alienated themselves from others who shared their faith in Christ but not their political agenda.

Yet Kuo's story of political seduction is, in the final analysis, a story about himself. Even after he left the White House, where he served as deputy director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, his God never failed. Invited back to Washington to attend the first National Faith-Based Conference, Kuo listened as Bush lied through his teeth, claiming credit for making faith-based initiatives central to his presidency (when the subject had been relegated to the back burner for fear of offending moderates) and citing wildly inflated figures for how much the administration was spending on the poor (when Kuo had told Bush that spending on faith-based initiatives had actually declined since the days of Clinton and Gore). But none of this shook Kuo's faith in the

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man. Although claiming to have been "crushed" by Bush's "deception," Kuo quickly brushes aside such disturbing thoughts. "Did he ever care about his antipoverty agenda?" he writes of Bush. "Personally, I doubt he could have cared more. His empathy couldn't be faked." He was, after all, a recovering alcoholic. "George W. Bush loves Jesus. He is a good man."

Tempting Faith is in its way a significant book, not for what it teaches about the Machiavellians in the White House—surely there are no longer any surprises to be had on that front—but for what we learn about young, idealistic, and phenomenally naïve Christians such as David Kuo. It is not an analysis of a mentality, but a documentation of it. To be sure, there is no doubting Kuo's sincerity. His faith in God is unwavering. He is truly committed to good work on behalf of the poor. He did eventually leave the White House, and with the publication of this book he testifies to the cynicism that he found there. But his recovered righteousness is itself a kind of alibi. For people like him served as enablers for one of the most immoral presidencies Americans have ever endured. If we are to know what makes Bush so bad, we need to know more about why people who are so good could ever have been seduced by him.

And not just seduced. Kuo, whose goodness is as self-evident as it is a tad creepy, continues to defend Bush after this most self-professed of Christian presidents robbed the poor to pay the rich, broke his covenant with the Framers who wrote the Constitution of the United States, launched the first war of choice in our history since Polk attacked Mexico or McKinley attacked Spain, justified torture without a qualm of conscience, and, to top it all off, wound up treating his Christian supporters with a contempt that would put the most determined secular humanist to shame.

II.

So much has been written about the role that religion plays in politics that we tend to forget that there is no such thing as "religion." There are, rather, religions, each of which has its own god or gods, prophets, holy texts, commandments, ways of worship, theories of interpretation, inventories of sins, and conceptions of the afterlife. Kuo's religion is of a very particular kind. Born-again Christians tend not to be liturgical in their religious practices; spontaneity of expression takes priority over never-changing ritual. They are not given to excessive theological exegesis; the text of the Bible tells them all they need to know. They generally prefer their rock music to Bach and Handel. Compared with Catholics, they are distrustful of hierarchy. Compared with Jews, they emphasize belief over observance. Compared with their mainline Protestant brethren, they worship with enthusiasm. And compared with every other religion on the face of the earth, they judge sincerity by the power of the stories that they tell each other.

Early in his career, Kuo found himself in the presence of John Ashcroft, who had been elected a senator from Missouri and needed people to work on his staff. During the interview, Kuo told Ashcroft how his father, an immigrant from China, was twice rejected for a visa to enter the United States. On his third attempt, a man came out of a side office and whispered something into the ear of the consular official who decided these things, and suddenly his dad was approved for entry. "My father never saw the man's name, never saw him again," Kuo informed the senator. "He believed it was an angel. I told Ashcroft I believed it, too." And Ashcroft replied, "How could you not?"

Then Ashcroft offered a testimony of his own. His father, a minister in an Assemblies of God church, came to see his son sworn in as a senator. The idea was proposed that for an event as solemn as this one, Ashcroft should be anointed with oil. Some Crisco was found, and Ashcroft's father, ailing heart and all, tried to rise from his sofa to conduct the ceremony. "You don't need to stand," Ashcroft told him. "John," his father replied, "I am not struggling to stand. I am struggling to kneel." Kneel he did, and, having anointed his son, he flew back to Missouri and died the very next day.

One of the most interesting aspects of these stories is that they are not true. As it happens, Kuo knew full well that no angel had intervened on behalf of his father; the elder Kuo had made a friend during World War II whose wife was a rich and powerful heiress, and it was through her connections that Kuo's father got his visa. Ashcroft is a bit more truthful: he was sworn into the Senate on January 3, 1995, and his father died on January 5—two days later, not one. But why obsess about the details? The point of testimony is to wonder about the wonder of it all. You are not supposed to interrupt Kuo's narrative to ask if human beings have more influence than angels. Telling a few pious white lies is fine so long as the larger truth about God's power to direct our lives is made.

Kuo's book concerns the way religious leaders were seduced by power, but it is clear from the stories he tells that evangelicals, given the role testimony plays in their lives, are far more seducible than most. John DiIulio, the political scientist who served as Kuo's first boss in the White House, provides an interesting contrast. To be sure, DiIulio, after leaving the White House and saying the first truly damning things about the Bush administration, soon thereafter praised the president as "a highly admirable person of enormous personal decency"; but this resembled a Rubashov-like recantation more than it did Kuo's wide-eyed innocence. Naïveté is just not something we associate with the streetwise Catholicism in which DiIulio was raised. Catholics have had seventeen hundred years of direct involvement with government: they are not easily surprised by political power and how it works. A realist if there ever was one, DiIulio allowed himself to be recruited by Bush, worked on his plan for faith-based initiatives for six months, correctly read the less-than-enthusiastic handwriting on the wall, and returned to academia. He never lost his innocence, because he had no innocence to lose.

Kuo, on the other hand, stayed on in the White House long after DiIulio left, repeatedly insisting to himself that he was not going to fall for the tricks being played on him every day—and then fell for all of them, one after another. Even after a car crash nearly cost him his life and led to the discovery of a brain tumor, Kuo remained sweetly on the job, only to be used again. The Bushies, now interested in mobilizing their base, wanted proof that religious groups were being treated unfairly because they were not allowed to discriminate in hiring. Kuo dutifully carried out the research, only to discover that almost no one ever sued a religious organization on grounds of discrimination. "Honey," a female black minister told one of Kuo's colleagues, "if you can't figure out someone's religion with-

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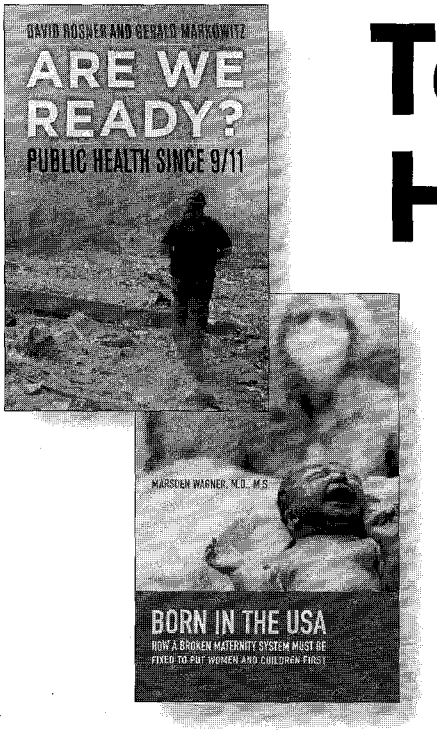
out asking them the question, well, then you just stupid." (Evidently, streetwise African American Protestants are just as practical in affairs of state as world-weary Catholics). Finally Kuo, exhausted and dispirited, turned in his resignation. His wife "was waiting for me in the West Wing lobby. I took her hand, left the building, looked back at the beautiful place where I had been blessed to work, gave her a kiss, and we walked through the gates back into life."

UNLIKE PEOPLE FROM RELIGIOUS traditions with long histories of involvement with politics, evangelicals have no firm foundation in history, theology, or experience against which they can judge the words that so easily come out of the mouths of politicians. Sincerity, for them, is everything, which is another way of saying that facts are nothing. The proof of their faith is its credulity. After he went to work for Ashcroft—yes, he got the job—Kuo, like many young evangelicals recruited by Republican conservatives, began to hear about that governor down in Texas with the famous first and last names. Bush, these enthusiastic idealists told each other, was born-again just like they were. Kuo relates a story about how, on a visit to a prison, Governor Bush had heard some of the inmates singing "Amazing Grace" and immediately joined in, swaying arm-in-arm with a convicted murderer. Lo and behold, six years later the convict, now a janitor in a Houston church, shows up at the White House to meet the president. Once he has found Jesus, Kuo preaches, "even the most 'hopeless' person could be forever changed."

Skeptical people will read this tale and wonder how a convicted murderer found himself released from prison in hard-nosed Texas. They might also ask why Bush never met with another Texas inmate—the axe-wielding Karla Faye Tucker, who had been changed forever by her born-again conversion—or showed even the slightest interest in her redemption; if anything, Bush, according to Tucker Carlson, mocked her pleas for mercy. But these are not matters that Kuo, the puerile anti-skeptic, addresses. Bush begins and ends his day with prayer, and that, for Kuo, settles the matter. "As a professing fellow believer in Jesus," he writes of Bush, "I trusted him." A majority of Americans no longer do, but then a majority of Americans are not evangelicals.

"Everyone comes to politics," Kuo remarks, "with a particular set of spiritual or philosophical beliefs motivating them—beliefs about the nature of man and the nature of government, whether derived from Jesus or David Hume, Moses or Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Camus, or Homer Simpson." This is nonsense. Hume—or, for that matter, Homer Simpson—demanded proof. Kuo never does. A lying Christian? It is just not possible. A man who oozes sincerity but is about as insincere as a man can be? The ironic stuff of literature, perhaps; but such complications, such truths, play no role in Kuo's happy imagination. Born-again Christians are not merely biblical literalists. If Kuo is any example, they are existential literalists, too—so totally lacking in irony that not to hoodwink them would be to leave them disappointed.

WITHOUT FOUNDATIONS FOR making judgments, evangelicals such as Kuo can persuade themselves about matters of significance that cannot pass even the most basic historical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or philosophical tests. Kuo's "patron saint" is William Wilberforce, the evangelical leader of the Clapham sect who did so much to bring about the abolition of the British slave trade. "If slavery had been the moral issue for Christians in the nineteenth century," he writes, "abortion was the same for many late twentieth-century Christians." Abortion was the issue that brought about Kuo's political awakening. While studying at Tufts University, Kuo had helped his girlfriend obtain one, only to feel so guilty that he helped create a pro-life group at the school. Even as he accepted an internship with Senator Edward Kennedy—"I loved him," Kuo characteristically gushes—he started moving to the right. "Just like William Wilberforce, I became an advocate for the ultimately forgotten, in this case, the unborn."

The fact that Kuo saw an equivalence between opposition to slavery and opposition to abortion says volumes about the difficulty that so many evangelicals have in making sharp distinctions. Many evangelicals insist to this day that their campaign against abortion is the moral equivalent of the abolitionist campaign against slavery. Those leaders were evangelicals, too; they point to such figures as Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose father was indeed the leading evangelical preacher of his era. They also sided with the weak against the powerful. They were as uncompromising with respect to their principles as leaders of the religious right are today. Regrettably, some anti-abortion activists resort to violence, but so, after all, did John Brown. Right-wing Republicans today are finishing the business begun by yesterday's social reformers.

Are they really? Equating abortion and slavery is the kind of analogy that appeals to people who prefer sincerity to reality. Let us grant that today's anti-abortion activists are as sincere in their desire to prevent the destruction of fetuses as William Lloyd Garrison was in his desire to abolish the South's peculiar institution. But everything else about the analogy falls apart. Slavery was a social system that trapped its victims through coercion and custom; abortion is the result of a decision made by an individual. People argue about whether a fetus is a full human being; but no one, as Abraham Lincoln liked to point out, disputed whether a slave was. Abortion represents a clash between two goods, the right of personal autonomy and the potential birth of a human being; slavery was evil and represented no good at all. Pro-life activists have every right to mobilize themselves on behalf of their political beliefs, but they do not have the right to claim historical predecessors so different from themselves. True of any contemporary group in general, this is especially true of evangelicals in particular. White Southerners whose favorite politicians appeal to latent Confederate sensibilities are not exactly in the best position to claim the moral mantle of those who understood, quite correctly, that the existence of slavery in the Southern states was a rebuke to every principle for which America stood.

Eventually Kuo would realize that the analogy that inspired his right-wing activism was inappropriate. "I suppose that as much as I wanted to be an American Wilberforce by ending abortion, I couldn't equate abortion and slavery," he writes. "Yes, I was still pro-life. But abortion wasn't slavery and it certainly wasn't, as some suggested, like the Holocaust. It simply wasn't murder." Kuo's account of his transformation on this issue is drearily matter-of-fact. There is no sudden moment of revelation, no blinding new insight, no shedding of the old ideas to take on the new. This is not the way Catholics break with their church, or communists with their party. One day Kuo believed one thing about a potent moral issue, and the next day he believed something else. One day he worked for Teddy Kennedy, the next day he found a position with John Ashcroft. One day he believed that Christians should jump into politics, the next day he did not. "It is easy to say that I became a Republican because I went through a religious conversion, felt guilty about an abortion, or just needed a job," he writes. "These things are all true." Kuo is above all else an evangelical, and he feels no obligation to explain why he changed his mind in any way that relies on logic, fact, or analysis. His testimony alone should suffice.

III.

In the concluding chapter of his unwittingly revealing book, Kuo proposes that Christians should engage in a "fast" from politics. Fasting, he points out, has long been associated with the life of the spirit. Christians should simply take a break from political involvement; two years—no more, no less—will do. While fasting, they can rediscover that "Christ alone is the answer and our desire." America will not lose its soul while they are going hungry, and once the fast is over they can return to public life with a better sense of how to balance the spiritual and the political.

The idea of a two-year fast from politics is pure Kuoism. By proposing it, Kuo need never address the intellectually challenging question of whether politics and religion corrupt each other in some ultimate sense. His fast simply represents a temporary leave of absence from the already low level of thinking that evangelicals such as himself have given to the dance of politics and religion. Two years

The Invention of Song

Not the face, the human face,
floating in its crippled spoon;
not the needle where it drinks
night after night; neither the watch,
the blood, nor the gold in hock,
the world liquefied to small bills
passed under the broker's jail;
no little crime of sweat that breaks
the child's lockbox of the body;
not the courage of the dour road
where it blisters into rough stone;
or the craze of the eye regarding
itself, the obsidian crystal;
not the mockery of the beast lung
bursting through its two blue doors;
or the shriek of birds glorified
with fear; not the pitch, the rock,
the ship of deaf sailors save one
lashed to his mast; not even the gash
of stars, the song, we are told,
too sweet to bear; but something
more, always more, the moon
in the wave, the animal, they say,
running in the Siren's veins,
the squall in the breach that calls
him out, mast or no mast, that grips
the buried shield of the sternum
as if it were the world's shield,
as if the heart dropped its massive
rope to hear, there, drowned in fog,
the sudden distance of its name.

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is perfect in this regard—long enough to seem sacrificial, short enough to guarantee that no serious reflection will take place (and that one can still get back in the game). If further proof were required that Kuo lacks the mental gravity to deal with the profound questions stemming from his own experience, this stunt should furnish it.

Before he wrote *Tempting Faith*, Kuo should have read Darryl Hart's recently published book *Secular Faith*. Hart is an evangelical scholar who thinks seriously and eloquently about the dilemmas that Kuo glibly avoids. His book offers the single best critique of the religious right's involvement in politics that I have read, at least in part because it comes from a man whose credentials as a conservative Christian are impeccable. Yes, evangelicals were deeply involved in social reform in the nineteenth century, as Hart acknowledges—but then he brings to life the ideas of Stuart Robinson (1814–1881), a Presbyterian from Kentucky who argued that they should not be so involved, and that politics and religion should be kept apart for their mutual benefit.

Hart's book reminds us of the extent to which evangelical Protestants, despite their current alliance with Catholics in opposition to abortion, once denounced Catholicism for its clericalist proclivities, just as it warns that the enthusiasm with which so many Protestant sects welcomed democracy in the nineteenth century came at the cost of confusing the authority of God with the authority of the people. "The state's purpose," writes Hart, summarizing the ideas of past Christian thinkers who have all but been forgotten, "is justice.... The church's purpose is mercy.... To confuse the two is to misconstrue the bad cop (the state) and the good cop (the church). The difference is really not that hard to grasp, except perhaps for those believers who would like the church to have the trappings of the state and for citizens who would like politics to fill a spiritual void."

Hart may not be correct that the distinction between the one realm and the other is easy to grasp. David Kuo certainly fails to grasp it, as do all those political opportunists masquerading as religious leaders with whom he broke. Unlike Pat Robertson and James Dobson, Kuo has parted ways with the Bush administration. But just like them, he confuses the realm of God with the realm of politics. "History, mystique, and the palpable sense of power are inspiring, surreal, and wonder filled," he writes upon entering not a church, but the White House. "Everything felt different. The carpet felt plusher and the couches softer. I watched serious staffers stride purposefully through the doors and tried to imagine what important things they were doing." Stuart Robinson, J. Gresham Machen, and all the other conservative Christians about whom Hart writes would have been appalled. Idolatry, for a believer, is a grave sin. Worshipping secular symbols is surely an idolatry.

KUO'S BOOK DOES MAKE ONE important contribution to America's current debate over evangelicalism's involvement in politics. Most warnings against the blending of religion and politics these days come not from Hart's position on the right, but from left-wing writers such as Michelle Goldberg (*Kingdom Coming*), Kevin Phillips (*American Theocracy*), and Rabbi James Rudin (*The Baptizing of America*). The general theme of those books is that evangelicals are dangerous because of their sectarianism. They sneak, stealthily into America's liberal democratic institutions with a determination to overturn them in favor of a Christian republic. Spewers of hate, they will, if given the chance, not only abolish America's commitment to separation of church and state—in some accounts, this is something they have already achieved—but will use every legal power at their command to suppress the rights of non-Christians, especially non-believers. When conservative religion swamps liberal democracy, fair play and pluralism yield to extremism and intolerance.

No doubt there are conservative Christians active in the Republican Party who could rightfully be called theocrats. Still, I have never been convinced of the danger they represent, at least in part because the more exposure they receive, the more likely most Americans are to dismiss them as cranks. (Pat Robertson is one of the most unpopular public figures in this country.) Evangelicalism in politics, far from threatening the future of American democracy, seems already to have peaked. Whatever is stirring voters in 2006, it is not the issues dear to the religious right. Karl Rove may get out the base, but when you come right down to it, the base is just not big enough to govern the country.

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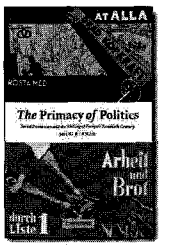

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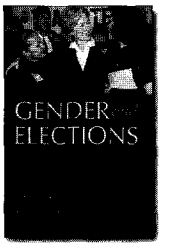

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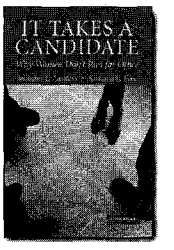

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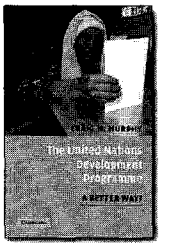

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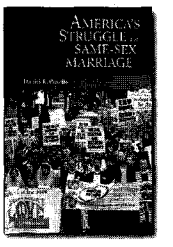

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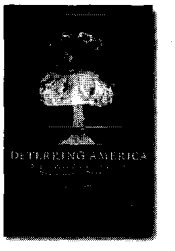

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If theocracy is not a looming danger to our democracy, bathos might be. For every evangelical leader spewing hate, there are ten evangelical followers who believe that all you need is love. David Kuo is one of them. He brought to the White House neither money nor mission, but only mush. No matter how much he came to disagree with the ruthless operatives with whom he was working, he writes, "I couldn't dislike them." After all, Harriet Miers, then White House counsel, had responded to his hospitalization by writing him a note offering love and prayers; and this, for him, counted far more than her—or anyone else's—position on anything involving actual policy. "From the moment I found Jesus—or Jesus found me—in high school, it was his peace I longed for. I didn't know what it meant or what it felt like. But wanting Jesus' peace made me ache." Most people seeking peace would not march willingly into the middle of a culture war. But Kuo, the kind of person who could actually be moved by one of Harriet Miers's treacly notes, did. His intentions were not malevolent. They were oblivious, which may be worse.

The last thing America needs now is more innocence. Most Americans have wildly unrealistic expectations of what politics can do, and, expecting too much, they settle for too little. We need leaders who can level with voters, offering good news when there is good news, but not afraid to share bad news when necessary. Religion may or may not help in cultivating such leaders, but evangelical religion offers precisely the wrong ingredients to make such leadership possible. Testimonialism simply does not make for serious politics (or serious religion). It is not enough for us to absolve presidents for today's mistakes because they have confessed to yesterday's sins. The one skill that policy-makers ought to possess is the willingness to look beyond personal feelings in order to enact sensible programs. David Kuo's religious sensibility never allowed him to do that. His book offers an acute warning of the dangers that evangelicals pose to democracy, not because they are too Machiavellian, but because they are not Machiavellian enough. ■

Helen Vendler
Fanciness and Fatality

HORSE LATITUDES: POEMS
By Paul Muldoon
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 107 pp., $22)

THE END OF THE POEM: OXFORD LECTURES
By Paul Muldoon
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 406 pp., $30)

I.

HOW ALLUSIVE SHOULD A poem be? Should readers be helped by notes? Eliot published *The Waste Land* first without notes, and then with them. Empson, confronting the issue of allusiveness, wrote:

> There is no longer a reasonably small field which may be taken as general knowledge. It is impertinent to suggest that the reader ought to possess already any odd bit of information one may have picked up in a field where one is oneself ignorant; such a point may be explained in a note without trouble to anybody....

Paul Muldoon may not himself be ignorant of any of the many fields (historical, philosophical, linguistic) to which he constantly alludes, but most of us, opening *Horse Latitudes*, his tenth volume of poems, may long for notes, and even for explanations.

The title poem is an enigmatic sonnet sequence, in which each sonnet is prefaced by a proper place name beginning with B. These titles seem to allude to battles, since we find among them such well-known battle places as Bannockburn and Bunker Hill: but where, we wonder, are Baginbun, Benburb, Badli-Ke-Serai, Bronkhorstspruit, and Bazentin? And why must all the title battles be B-battles? And what relation do the battles bear to the sonnets couched under them? With Google at hand, one can discover that Baginbun is the Wexford site of the Norman invasion of Ireland in 1170, Benburb is the Armagh site of a victory of the Irish over the Scotch in 1646, Badli-Ke-Serai (near Delhi) is the site of a battle during the India Mutiny, Bronkhorstspruit is the South African location of a battle in 1880 in the First Boer War, and Bazentin is one of the Somme battle places in World War I. Even when one recognizes familiar place names in the titles (Beijing, Burma, Beersheba), one may not know the battle being summoned up (at Beersheba, for instance, the Allies defeated the Turks of the Ottoman Empire in 1917).

THE PRINCIPAL DRAMATIS PERsonae in these opening sonnets of *Horse Latitudes* are a speaker and his woman companion, named Carlotta (who, in another poem, points out that her name is an anagram for "oral tact," or, as she puts it, "oral fucking tact"). They seem to be staying at the Vanderbilt Hotel in Nashville. Carlotta's dead grandfather is the third character in the sonnets. In the Army, he had to do awful things to pack-mules, such as cutting out their vocal cords so that their bray could not give away the position of the troops. (The grandfather was also a grammatical purist and aphorist, likely at any moment to correct Carlotta's placing of an adverb or to announce that the most insidious kind of censorship is self-censorship.) The speaker and Carlotta seem to inhabit the doldrums or "horse latitudes" (the 30th to 35th parallels) of middle age. (The latitudes were so named because sailors becalmed there were said to have thrown their horses overboard to save water.) Nashville falls within the horse latitudes, and so does Bermuda, where Muldoon is later found in this volume. Perhaps Bermuda is the cause of all the battles beginning with B?

I quote one of the sonnets of *Horse Latitudes* ("Beersheba") to give an idea of what the Muldoon style sounds like when it is resisting intelligibility:

> Now summoned also the young Turk
> who had suddenly arisen
> from that great pile of toot, heehaw,
> as from one of Beersheba's wells.
> Like the sail that all of a sudden
> swells
> or the yawl that all of a sudden yaws,

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a wind finding meaning in a mizzen
and toppling a bouncy castle.
Her grandfather fain to wrastle
each pack mule to a rubber mat
whereat ... whereat ... whereat ...
whereat ... whereat ...
he would eftsoons get down to work,
reaching into its wide-open wizen
while a helper clamped back its jaws.

We find here familiar Muldoon turns: the arbitrary title (the individual poems in Muldoon's 1990 sequence "Madoc" bore the names of philosophers, scientists, and so on); the historical allusions; the jokey language (from Spenserian "eftsoons" to Wild West "wrastle"); the slang ("toot" for "dung"); the interpolated low-style commentary phrase ("heehaw," and the poet as mule—Muldoon's second volume was called *Mules*); the puns and the sonic play ("the yawl that yaws"); the glance at contemporary absurdity, here the inflatable structures put up for children's parties ("a bouncy castle"); the break in syntax (the repetitive "whereats," which I suppose call up the successively mutilated mules); and the indistinct connection of all these to the historical battle of Beersheba or to the relations between the speaker and Carlotta. This sonnet (like its eighteen companions) rhymes in the "concealed" manner characteristic of Muldoon: the rhymes of the first three lines (*Turk*, *arisen*, *heehaw*) match the rhymes of the last three lines (*work*, *wizen*, *jaws*), while inside these brackets, three couplets ("wells / swells"; "castle / wrastle"; and "mat / whereat") sit next to two lines (ending in "yaws" and "mizzen") that rhyme with members of the first and last tercets.

Nothing exhilarates this poet more than an elaborate scheme that both provokes and confines the words or the rhymes that will fill it out. In the poem "The Birth," from 1994, the alphabet offers such a scheme: the things the poet's about-to-be-born daughter will find in the world are "apple-blossoms and chanterelles and damsons and eel-spears / and foxes and the general hubbub / of inkies and jennets and Kickapoos with their lemniscs / or peekaboo-quiffs of Russian sable / and tallow-unctuous vernix, into the realm of the widgeon— / the 'whew' or 'yellow-poll,' not the 'zuizin.'" Various lengthy rhyme schemes pervade Muldoon's volumes, many so complex that the reading eye does not perceive them. Then again, the containing scheme can be an acrostic, as when the initial letters of the poem "Capercaillies" in the 1990 volume *Madoc* spell out "Is this a New Yorker poem or what?"

ONE THING THAT CAN BE SAID for *Horse Latitudes* is that nobody else writes like this. Muldoon has made an unmistakable style for himself, in both short poems and long. From the beginning, he has added to the lyrics of each volume a more elaborate longer poem, sometimes narrative and sometimes lyric. *Horse Latitudes* follows this pattern: its long closing poem is also an elegy, the three-part "Sillyhow Stride," written in *aba* tercets that on the page resemble Dante's underworld terza rima. ("Sillyhow" is an archaic word for "caul," which Muldoon later applies to his dying sister's oxygen mask; the poet is perhaps to be thought of in "Sillyhow Stride" as playing stride piano.) The elegy commemorates the composer-pianist-singer Warren Zevon, dead of mesothelioma, and Muldoon's younger sister Maureen, vanquished, like Muldoon's mother, by metastasized uterine cancer.

Muldoon's long poems, "Sillyhow Stride" included, are always a breakneck cinematic unreeling of truth, fiction, journeys, crossed plots, snapshots, memories, illustrations, quotations, and allusions. They can be tiresome or exhilarating, depending on how well their glittering surface coordinates with the momentum pulsating underneath it. Lamenting the undoing of youthful dazzle, "Sillyhow Stride" sketches Zevon's descent into alcohol and drugs, his struggle against addiction, his re-addiction, and ultimately his premature death. It intercuts its progress, as it scans Zevon's life, not only with slang, rock terms, and Zevon song-titles ("excitable boy") but also with phrase after phrase from the poetry of Donne, as though only Donne offers words reckless enough for a life lived at the edge and intense enough to convey simultaneous love and dread:

Two graves must hide, Warren,
thine and mine corse ...

The alcoholic
knows that to enter in these bonds

is to be free, yeah right....

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O wrangling schools that search
what fire
shall burn this world . . .

had none the wit unto this knowledge
to aspire,

that this *your* fever, the fever that
still turns
the turntable, might be it?

The poem goes on in this allusive fashion even to its end, even to the turkey buzzards (ornithologically, *Cathartes aura*) who, hovering over carrion, ascend after their grisly meal through the rooms and bars where Zevon drank and played the piano:

turkey buzzards waiting for you to
eclipse and cloud them with a wink

as they hold out their wings and of
the sun his working vigor borrow
before they parascend through
the Viper Room or the
Whisky A Go Go,
each within its own "cleansing
breeze," its own *Cathartes aura*.

In his poem for Zevon and Maureen, Muldoon is, far more than in the sonnets of *Horse Latitudes*, at pains to make his lines intelligible—not "accessible" (that favorite American vulgarity) but clear, even while studding his page with the names of friends, technical music terms, quotations from Donne, and glimpses of current horrors ("child soldiers from the Ivory Coast or Zaire"). He explains, at least implicitly, whatever he cites from his encyclopedic reading and his equally encyclopedic memory. For instance, in his indescribably savage elegy for Maureen, called "Turkey Buzzards," Muldoon makes use of, but also explains for the reader, the fact (I quote the Cornell Bird Guide) that the turkey buzzard "often defecates on its own legs, using the evaporation of the water in the feces to cool itself down." With the grim and jesting nihilism (the aggressive face of sorrow) that governs the poem, Muldoon speaks of

the nifty,
nay *thrifty*, way

these buzzards are given to stoop
and take their ease
by letting their time-chastened poop
fall to their knees

till they're almost as bright with lime
as their night roost. . . .

"Turkey Buzzards" owes something to the lurid satisfactions of Baudelaire's "La Charogne," but Muldoon's poem of carrion has a wild terseness absent from Baudelaire's meditation. To Muldoon, the turkey buzzard stands in for art, as it beautifully soars over life and then stoops to consume it. (The Cornell Bird Guide again: "Although it has an ugly, bare-skinned face, the Turkey Vulture is beautiful on the wing. Seldom does this graceful and talented bird flap its wings as it soars over large areas searching for carrion.")

MULDOON BEGINS THE STRIKing elegy for Maureen with a view of two circling buzzards. (A total wheel of buzzards would amount, as he sees things, to a hellish parody of the Dantesque and Eliotic "multifoliate rose"; these buzzards are merely two petals of that rose):

They've been so long above it all
those two petals
so steeped in style they seem to stall
in the kettle

simmering over the town dump
or, better still,
the neon-flashed, X-rated rump
of fresh roadkill. . . .

We see things from the greedy point of view of the vulture as it descends on a corpse:

trying . . . to get to grips
with the grommet
of the gut, setting its tinsnips
to that grommet.

But the poet's dying sister is now the envisaged subject of the birds' zest for fresh meat. Could she, Muldoon bitterly wonders, take the vulture's "blissful" point of view and perceive that elegy is every poet's favorite genre?

it's hard to imagine, dear Sis,
why others shrink
from this sight of a soul in bliss,
so in the pink

from another month in the red
of the shambles. . . .

The viciousness of the poet's dissection finally turns on the buzzards themselves, as they take infection from a corpse and learn at last, like all artists, their own mortality, realizing in the end that their aesthetic disengagement has removed them from warm proximity to life. The buzzards have now to give up soaring in style over "the thick scent / of death":

buzzards getting the hang at last
of being stripped

of their command of the vortex
while having lost
their common touch, they've been
so long
above it all.

Sardonic in grief, "Turkey Buzzards" is the most anguished poem in *Horse Latitudes*, a volume suffused by the losses accompanying middle age. (Muldoon, who published his first book as a precocious youngster in 1973, is now fifty-five.)

INDEED, THE FIRST SONNET OF *Horse Latitudes* announces diminished expectations: "For now our highest ambition / was simply to bear the light of the day / we had once been planning to seize." Many of Muldoon's earlier volumes contained poems of adventurous seizing, but his current pieces tend toward generational sadness. In a sestina called "The Last Time I Saw Chris," he knows that he and his friends are passing

from an era in which we were all
still relatively sound
in wind and limb to an era of night
sweats, gasps, and pants,
. . . now threatening to tar
all of us, straight or gay, with the same
brush, the god who oversaw
our not knowing of him yearning now
to mete

out retribution. . . .

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That is the gist of the elegy for Chris, but the poem would not be Muldoonish unless a salient flourish were to inscribe, into the recipe for grief, some dash of the demotic. The third line that I quoted above actually begins with one of the two slangy interpolations—"for crying out loud" and "for the love of Mike"—that recur in alternating stanzas throughout the poem:

> night sweats, gasps, and pants,
> for the love of Mike, now threatening
> to tar
> all of us....

The other interpolation, in one of its appearances, had entered a recommendation that a condom be used in sex: "No monkey/business without an overcoat, for crying out loud."

Muldoon, who once called himself (in a sequence dropped from his *Collected Poems*) "The Prince of the Quotidian," brings in such colloquial interpolations (including, as we've seen earlier, "hee-haw") as one of his forms of refrain, tethering the poem to the mundane. Unlike Yeats, who regularly alternated between princely seriousness and quotidian speech, between "aristocratic" poems and earthy ballads, Muldoon refuses to sequester one plane of English (or one plane of personal response) from another. It is this refusal that makes his elegies for Maureen and Warren Zevon so unnerving, as they zoom up and down the scale of intimacy and distance.

II.

MULDOON DISLIKES SAYING things "straight." For him, that seems boring (and even unnatural in a poet). But nothing could be more "straight"—and also cunning—than his self-portrait here as an "outlier" ("something separated or distanced from the rest"). Earlier in *Horse Latitudes*, Muldoon remarked that as a child his father sat on a bench "at the end of a lane marked by two white stones." In the minimalist autobiography "The Outlier," the stones have become the speaker's parents. (Necessary notes: Muldoon was born in Northern Ireland in June 1951; the "Fomorians" mentioned in the poem, original nature gods of Ireland, were sometimes said to have only one eye.) "The Outlier" rhymes in immobile fashion on "one-eyed" words (all formed on the single template "vowel + n"). In each of its two parts, the stanzas gradually "grow" from two lines to three to four to five, enacting the process by which nurture distorts an already distorted nature:

> I
>
> In Armagh or Tyrone
> I fell between two stones.
>
> In Armagh or Tyrone
> on a morning in June
> I fell between two stones.
>
> In Armagh or Tyrone
> on a morning in June
> in 1951
> I fell between two stones.
>
> In Armagh or Tyrone
> on a morning in June
> in 1951
> I fell between two stones
> that raised me as their own.
>
> II
>
> I had one eye, just one,
> they prised and propped open.
>
> I had one eye, just one,
> they prised and propped open
> like a Fomorian's.
>
> I had one eye, just one,
> they prised and propped open
> like a Fomorian's
> with a fire-toughened pine.
>
> I had one eye, just one,
> they prised and propped open
> like a Fomorian's
> so all I looked upon
> would itself turn to stone.

This eerie poem, recounting a step-by-step growth of awareness, shows stony parents creating a child version of their own stoniness. In time, the stoniness develops from an inward condition into an outward-reaching blight. Unable not to look at his surroundings, with his perpetually propped-open eye (the eye of culture which has cruelly supervened on that of nature), the adult sees the organic world itself turning to stone around him.

Muldoon's moving minimalism of structure and rhyme in "The Outlier" is the other pole to the gigantism of his long poems. Other minimalist poems in his new book are less successful. It was inevitable, I suppose, that when instant-messaging became possible, Muldoon would write instant messages. In "90 Instant Messages to Tom Moore," Muldoon (apparently on holiday in Bermuda) assimilates instant-messaging to *aba* rhymed haiku, and addresses his messages to Tom Moore, the Irish songwriter, who himself spent the year of 1803 in the "horse latitudes" of Bermuda. Muldoon's instant messages have their moments, but mostly their wit seems labored, as in this Heraclitean haiku:

> Hamilton. Tweeds? Tux?
> Baloney? Abalone?
> Flux, Tom. Constant flux.

And by the end of Muldoon's sojourn in the doldrums, the haiku have become tautologically bleak, their monorhyme the equivalent of deadness:

> Completely at odds.
> We're now completely at odds.
> Completely at odds.

In each of his volumes, the clever Muldoon, known for his cleverness,

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somewhere lets his full ingenuity loose in a tightly formed longer lyric: here, that poem is "The Old Country," a satiric sonnet sequence on Ireland (which actually has a contest every year for the best "tidy town"). The sequence is a linked "corona" (a "wreath" form used by Donne among others) in which the last line of sonnet I is the first of sonnet II, and so on. (Muldoon competitively does the form twice over in this single poem.) "The Old Country" explodes the clichés of Irish utterance, using as its template "Every x was a y." The poet has left the old sod, where in the past a "half" (a half-pint of beer) could be had cheap, in the old coinage, and the diet did nothing for one's health. It was a country

> Where every town was a tidy town
> and every garden a hanging garden.
> A half could be had for half a crown.
> Every major artery would harden
>
> since every meal was a square meal.

The formal template is maintained with high spirits and a profusion of meanings, exposing the dolorous upshot of everything in Ireland, from roadworks to diction, from sex to architecture:

> Every start was a bad start ...
> Every major road had major
> roadworks ...
> Every resort was a last resort ...
> Every lookout was a poor lookout ...
> Every ditch was a last ditch ...
> Every boat was a burned boat ...
> Every cut was a cut to the quick ...
> Every hope was a forlorn hope ...
> Every slope was a slippery slope.

The poem ends as it began, in that Muldoon-forsaken country where, for the young,

> every dance was a last dance
> and every chance a last chance
> and every letdown a terrible letdown
>
> from the days when every list was a
> laundry list
> in that old country where,
> we reminisced,
> every town was a tidy town.

Although he has lived in the United States for years, and is married to an American, Muldoon remains irremediably Irish, as are many of his poems and much of his prose; but, as the ironic observer that he is, he takes an angled and quizzical stance toward his country of origin, as toward almost everything else.

III.

Critics have found Muldoon useful as an example of post-this and post-that (post-colonialism and postmodernism, mostly); but he is both too mercurial and too traditional to be so easily confined and defined. He looks more often backward than forward, and delights in tracking today back not only into yesterday, but into yesteryear and yester-era, as he does here in a charming shaggy-dog poem called "Tithonus." (Tithonus, the subject of a famous elegiac poem by Tennyson, was the youth given immortality by the gods in answer to the plea of his beloved, the goddess of the dawn, who forgot to add eternal youth to her request; she remained forever young, while Tithonus declined into a chirping grasshopper.) Muldoon, trying to identify a strange sound in his house, recalls, in a single long backtracking sentence, various possible noises associated with a grandmother, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, and great-great-grandmother only to realize, with delight in being part of an even more ancient story, that the sound is "the two-thousand-year-old chirrup/ of a grasshopper." Although it could be said that the comic succession of ancestral sounds is an example of eclectic postmodernism, it could equally well be argued that Muldoon, in joining his poem to Greek myth, to Milton's cricket on the hearth, to Keats's grasshopper, and to Tennyson's "Tithonus," is sustaining an uninterrupted tradition.

Although Muldoon has had postcolonial moments, many of his poems remain entirely within a rural Irish horizon unconscious of England. Of the many poems in *Horse Latitudes* that track a story back in time, the Irish poem "Eggs" is the most painfully memorable. It recalls a family anecdote kept "hush-hush" in the house, a story about Muldoon's maternal grandmother, who used to bicycle in from Cullenramer to the market in Dungannon with a dozen fresh eggs to sell, eggs she had scoured into whiteness with a potash rag. (Every other stanza contains the word "eggs"; others contain the phrase "hush-hush," the two repeated insertions summing up the story.) One day the egg seller disgraced herself in drink at the market, using up her indispensable egg money, and was brought unceremoniously home in a farmer's truck:

> It would be midnight when my
> mother's mother got back
>
> from Dungannon, now completely
> smashed
> on hard liquor bought with hard cash,
> fuck you, cash on the barrel. It was all
> hush-hush
>
> as she was taken from a truck
> painted matter-of-factly MILK & EGGS
> into which they'd bundled her,
> along with her bike,
>
> for delivery to Cullenramer. It would
> be all hush-hush
> next morning in the whitewashed
> scullery where she wrung out the
> potash
>
> rag and took it to another dozen or so
> new-laid eggs.

What else was the young housewife to do the next morning but bend once more under the yoke to which she had yesterday said "fuck you"? The poet leaves it to our imagination to picture her having to present herself again in the market where the "hush-hush" gossip would center on her humiliation of the night before. Muldoon—ever the master of distancing himself while involving himself—frames, fore and aft, this unbearable vignette of a past family scandal with a comically rendered Proustian moment of his own. The eggs he is unpacking at home in New Jersey remind the poet of his grandmother's disastrous fall from grace, which he sets about resurrecting in his imagination:

> I was unpacking a dozen eggs
> into the fridge when I noticed a
> hairline crack
> at which I pecked
>
> till at long last I squeezed

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into a freshly whitewashed
scullery in Cullenramer.

As Muldoon ends the poem, he links his grandmother's past to his own present: his chastened grandmother takes up the potash rag once more, applying it

to another dozen or so new-laid eggs,
from any one of which I might yet
poke
my little beak.

The appeal of the anecdote to the poet is precisely that it is "hush-hush," whispered within the family, never referred to aloud; the poet pokes into any crack where obscured stories lie, since it is part of the vocation of the writer to unveil prudishly covered-up actualities. But the voyeurism of the storyteller, like the airy superiority of the turkey buzzards to their prey, will perhaps go before a fall, a crack in the smooth whiteness of the egg.

His youth in Northern Ireland may account for Muldoon's sense that art and violence are inextricably connected. In the excellent poem "Medley for Morin Khur," the wherewithal for art's instrument (the morin khur is a Mongolian violin) is seen to come from the death of horses:

The sound box is made of a horse's
head.
The resonator is horse skin.
The strings and bow are of horsehair.

As the poem ends, the call of the violin

may no more be gainsaid
than that of blood kin to kin
through a body-strewn central square.

A square in which they'll heap the
horses' heads
by the heaps of horse skin
and the heaps of horsehair.

The grotesque abundance of violin supplies from bloody Mongolian massacres is shaming to the artist, although he will, we know, scavenge a skull here, some skin there, some horsehair elsewhere, and begin to fabricate his morin khur. This is a poem stemming, at least in part, from the "troubles" in Northern Ireland, but its Mongolian setting, so far afield, makes it resonate through other countries, other conflicts, other "body-strewn" central squares.

Everyone has recognized (and some have criticized) Muldoon's investment in all forms of language—foreign, archaic, local, dialectical, learned, recherché. In one of the poems in his new book, Muldoon is taking his son to see the site of his parents' house in Ireland. The poet's love of the English language generates a comic refrain reiterating the poem's title and referring to the poet's ancestors: "At least they weren't speaking French." The sheer number of words in modern English (by comparison with modern French) makes Muldoon's exuberant linguistic variety possible: what kind of poet could he have been if the family stories had come down to him in the language of Racine? In spite of the comic refrain, all the incidents of the poet's father's family retold in the poem are dire: a tale of parental absence is followed by a tale of infant death and a tale of septicemia, and these events are framed by the almost mute existence of Irish rural parents, even in catastrophe. Such parents are astonished at the modern generation, who actually talk; they themselves would blench if they found themselves speaking aloud (in the Irish idiom, "giving out"). Nothing, no matter how terrifying ("Not the East Tyrone Brigade, not Baader-Meinhof") would have brought the suggestion of a frown

to those two mummer stones still
trying to lie low, trying to keep
their mummery down
to a bare minimum, two stones that,
were they to speak, might blench
as much at their own giving out as our
taking in that at least they weren't
speaking French.

Showing off as usual, Muldoon builds the whole of this thirty-six-line poem (except for its refrain "*fol-de-rol fol-de-rol fol-de-rol-di-do*") on three rhyme-sounds (-ench, -one, and -oth). *French*, *bench*, *trench*, *clench*, *stench*, *wrench*, and *blench* are, for example, the "-ench" words; and Muldoon, seeking them out one by one and writing lines around them, enjoys cramming his ancestors into this tragicomic Procrustean bed. Yet the linguistic high-jinks have not been allowed, here, to occlude feeling; Muldoon keeps both fanciness and fatality in focus. (Note: in the following passage describing Muldoon's young uncle dying from septicemia, "sowans" or "flummery" is a food made from the husks of oats):

At least they weren't speaking French
when another brother, twenty-
something, stepped on a nail
no one had bothered to clench
in a plank thrown
halfheartedly from the known to
the unknown

fol-de-rol fol-de-rol fol-de-rol-di-do

across a drainage ditch on a building
site. His nut-brown arm. His leg
nut-brown.
That nail sheathed in a fine down
would take no more than a week or
ten days to burgeon from the froth
of that piddling little runoff

fol-de-rol fol-de-rol fol-de-rol-di-do

and make of him a green and burning
tree. His septicaemia-crown.
Sowans as much as he could manage.
Trying to keep that flummery down
as much as any of them could
manage. However they might
describe the stench,
as exhalation, as odor, at least they
weren't speaking French.

A balladic nonsense refrain always implies that eventually everything subsides to story, to story retold, to story hoary with age, and to story devolving at last into unintelligible syllables. The sympathy for the dying boy and his desperate parents, the comic grotesquerie of "At least they weren't speaking French," and the detached yesteryear folk refrain constitute here that peculiar mixture of affect that characterizes the Muldoon style.

This mixture of odd emotions magnetized by a single event appears again in the sonnet "Hedge School," as the poet hears, while in Scotland, that the doctors have found a "metastasis" of Maureen's cancer, that his sister will die of the can-

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cer that killed their mother. In the space of a moment, Muldoon's relentlessly etymological self wants to know the root of "metastasis"; his furtive ingenious self is trying to figure out how to unseal the shrink-wrap on a shop dictionary so that he can discover the Greek word's root; and his narcissistic historical self is recalling that another "Maelduin" was a bishop in St. Andrews in 673—while, deeper than all these, his shocked fraternal self is "lash'd with woe," as he has said earlier, quoting Shakespeare:

> —all past and future mornings
> were impressed
>
> on me just now, dear Sis,
> as I sheltered in a doorway on
> Church Street in St. Andrews
> (where, in 673, another Maelduin
> was bishop),
>
> and tried to come up with a ruse
> for unsealing the *New Shorter Oxford*
> *English Dictionary* back in that
> corner shop
> and tracing the root of *metastasis*.

Rhyming "Sis" with "metastasis" clinches (for the poet) the possession of his sister by the disease. Words retain, for him, a literal power to confirm a fact, just as facts (the moment in a doorway, St. Andrews, Maelduin, the dictionary, the shop, metastasis) must be imaginatively fused into a single gestalt by rhyme and sonnet form. In this accurate inventory of the compulsions (autobiographical, etymological, historical) that possess him even in a moment of horror, Muldoon pitilessly clones in verse his disconcerting self.

IV.

PAUL MULDOON SEEMS TO ME A more convincing poet now than he was ten or fifteen years ago. Recently, while continuing to write poetry, he has been commissioned into prose. Some years ago he published *To Ireland I*, the Clarendon Lectures at Oxford, concerning Irish poetry and organized in an alphabetical scheme from "Amergin" to "Zozimus," and then, as professor of poetry at Oxford, he delivered the fifteen lectures on individual poems that are now collected into *The End of the Poem*. Muldoon is a bizarre critic, a shape-shifter. He turns every poet he considers into some version of himself.

To his mind, a poet is one who creates an extravagantly odd chain of allusions, puns, phonetic links, mutations among words, crypto-etymologies, and so on. Muldoon became notorious for saying in an essay, about Robert Frost's "The Silken Tent," that "I cannot but, can't but, hear a 'cunt' in the sil*ken* tent." In an equally far-fetched way, he remarks here of Arnold's withdrawing Sea of Faith in "Dover Beach": "The word 'withdrawing' occurs just one line before the word 'retreating,' and I want to propose that this near-redundancy may represent a little nub of indeterminacy which may be an indicator of a subliminal presence in the word 'withdrawing.' The presence is that of Darwin, a version of whose name is found in 'with*drawing*.'" This sort of untenable inference is dear to Muldoon, unprovable and unlikely as it is. He makes *pro forma* apologies for his inferences, but he cannot let go of them.

He especially likes to provide extended commentaries on words that do not appear in the poem under discussion, but to which he wants to grant "a subliminal presence." In his lecture on Yeats's "All Souls' Night," the two such words proposed by Muldoon (but not present in the poem) are "lees" and "cork." Yeats, because it is the night of the dead, has set out two glasses of wine, hoping that some ghost will come to keep him company, but reminding himself that any ghost that may come will find it sufficient to "drink from the wine-breath / While our gross palates drink from the whole wine." Muldoon, proceeding via Keats's "emptying some dull opiate to the drains" in the "Ode to a Nightingale," says,

> [There exists] a synonym for the "drains" in what has been "emptied ... to the drains," a term which, in his simultaneous recognition of, and resistance to, its appropriateness, would have presented Yeats with a problem. The term is "lees," which *Webster's* defines as "dregs, grounds, residue," and it's an indicator of what lies under the surface of these lines which centre on his wife Georgie Hyde-*Lees*.

In the Yeats poem there is no suggestion of anything being drained to the dregs (nobody in fact touches the wine). There are no lees, there is no mention of Georgie Hyde-Lees being with the poet (the second glass of wine having been set out for the hoped-for ghostly visitor), and the "our" has to do with human beings' way of drinking, by contrast with the more ethereal and ecstatic inhaling proper to ghosts:

> It is all Souls' Night.
> And two long glasses brimmed with
> muscatel
> Bubble upon the table. A ghost
> may come;
> For it is a ghost's right
> His element is so fine
> Being sharpened by his death,
> To drink from the wine-breath
> While our gross palates drink from
> the whole wine

After naming the possible dead friends who might come, in ghost form, to join him at the table, Yeats concludes,

> But names are nothing. What matter
> who it be,
> So that his elements have grown
> so fine
> The fume of muscatel
> Can give his sharpened palate ecstasy
> No living man can drink from the
> whole wine.

Continuing his commentary on this passage, Muldoon wants to make a further suggestion, which will, he says,

> strike some as being totally off-the-wall, but which falls into a way of reading which I find useful.... It has to do with being alert to another resisted usage—a word, like "lees," which simply does not find its way onto the page but which is central to a poem that is prefaced by the opening of a bottle of wine. The word I'm thinking of is "cork," and it's a word that would have been much in Yeats's mind ... given that the mayor of the city of Cork ... had died in Brixton Prison only a few days earlier.

All of Muldoon's lectures depend on this sort of giddy non-referential referentiality, in which a spool of possible resonances unwinds backward as far as

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possible from the (often absent) word where it began. He loves the possibility that "*Nomen est omen*," as he says in a jocular passage:

> Now, I know that this kind of reading may sometimes seem ... a little fiddle-headed, but what can I do? I'm sitting at a desk I acquired from the gentleman who looks after surplus furniture at Princeton. His name is Sam Formica. On the desk are two books. One is *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* by Michael Pollan. The other is Archie G. Walls's *Geometry and Architecture in Islamic Jerusalem*. An *Archie Walls* who specializes in Islamic architecture, including "the great horseshoe *arch*" ... a *Pollan* who specializes in pollination, a *Formica* who oversees formica? It's humorous in a parlour-gamish way, in the *Nomen est omen* mode I'm fond of playing with.

These lectures—provocative, often amusing, sometimes even true—prompt the question of how fond of such "parlour games" the authors of the poems might have been. Such a question does not bother Muldoon, who, believing that the reader always personally recreates a poem, recasts these poems in his own image. Sometimes the process enlivens the poem, sometimes not. Muldoon's most interesting lectures are those on Frost, Bishop, and Lowell, poets he has admired for many years. (Not that these lectures are devoid of the arcane Muldoonian cryptography: "The fact that ... 'élan' [is] to be found in 'Ireland' is not without its reason.... It is that Henri Bergson was of Irish extraction, both his parents being Irish-Jewish.")

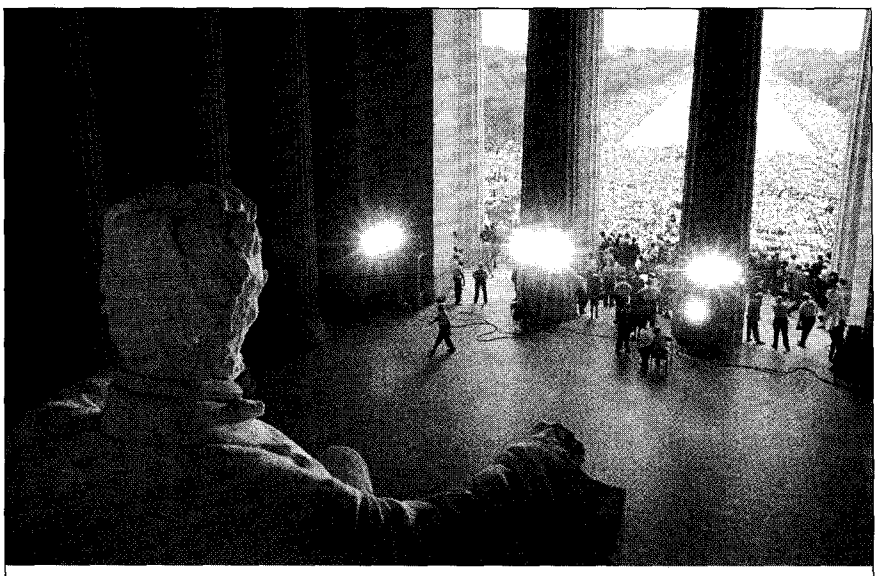
BUT THE MORE ATTRACTIVE THINGS in *The End of the Poem* are Muldoon's general statements about the art of poetry, which spring up irrepressibly in the midst of his whimsical commentaries. These reflections remind readers of truths not often enunciated:

> One may scan the poem as a shape on the page, taking in aspects of its geometry, well before one embarks on what we think of as a conventional line-by-line reading.... Another of the unlikely, generally overlooked, aspects of reading a poem has to do with the intermittent quality of our reading, so that having begun it, and proceeded a little into it, one may now leap back to the beginning, now again leap forward.

In the lecture on Bishop's prose poem "12 O'Clock News," Muldoon remarks: "Yet another sense of the phrase ['the end of the poem'] I'll be focusing on ... is that of the precise location of the surface of the poem, particularly when there seems to be a discrepancy between the surface and the subterranean—what we generally term 'irony.'" And in his discussion of Stevie Smith, he announces a theory of poetry as ventriloquism that perfectly suits his own ever-ironic poetics: "A female poet is re*membering* a male speaker, allowing him to speak through her in the act of ventriloquism of which every single poem is an example."

He usefully surprises us (given his own torrentially allusive practice) by reflecting, in his lecture on Lowell, that although "no poem may be read as a completely discrete construct, we also know that part of the function of the poem is to present a construct that is *relatively* free-standing, to create a relatively squared-off stand of timber on the plain." And commenting on Montale's "The Eel," Muldoon gaily suggests that "there's a strong sense of the poem as an autonomous creature ... one which, as it bucks and bounds and comes into being under [its writer and reader], remains intact." These observations are more restorative, certainly, than those crypto-cipher-scrutinies peering at words in invisible ink between the lines of poems.

Age has deepened Muldoon's poetry, and in *Horse Latitudes* he has been able, in his finely maintained tightrope act, to bear aloft both grief and playfulness. He is still enamored of the absolutely arbitrary, and he may always be attracted to abstract schemes, since he belongs to that line of poets (from Herbert through Auden to Moore, Merrill, and Ashbery) who find in the most arbitrary poetic forms an entrancing stimulus to imagination and expression. For Muldoon, tragic stories in arbitrary cages make for the ultimate effect: "a gloom ... distinctly shot through with glee," unnerving for the exasperated and admiring reader, but true to the mixed motives of the serious shadowplay of art. ■



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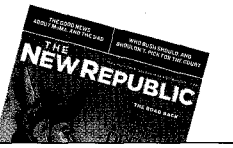

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SINJAR DIARIST

Devil's Advocates

THE SUREST WAY TO MAP Iraq's ethnic and sectarian fault lines is by how quickly a U.S. helicopter flies over them. Choppers race over Sunni areas, nearly sideways to the ground in some places. But, a few miles outside of the town of Sinjar by the Syrian border, the Blackhawks slow to a leisurely speed: Yezidi live below. These ancient people, who number in the thousands and consider themselves neither Christian nor Muslim, cherish their occupiers. Yezidi party leader Waad Hamed Modo greets me in a Sinjar courtyard with his own testimonial. "I met recently with Sunnis in Baghdad," he says. "They told me, 'You Yezidi are collaborators.' I said to them, 'That's right—we are collaborators.' " Colonel Sean MacFarland, commander of the First Armored Division's First Brigade Combat Team (1-1 AD) says that Sinjar "feels like Paris in 1944." Parents and children line the streets when U.S. patrols pass by, while Yezidi clerics pray for the welfare of U.S. forces. More even than Paris, in fact, Sinjar feels like Iraq as Dick Cheney predicted it would be.

A SMALL U.S. OUTPOST—WHICH, THE Yezidi say, shines like a beacon to them at night—marks the summit of Sinjar Mountain, the landscape's signature feature. As we snake our way up a sharply winding road to the peak, a young Yezidi named Saydow Nasser explains some of the more exotic Yezidi folkways. "A Muslim army dressed in blue came to kill us," he says, "so naturally we don't wear blue." (Yezidi don't eat lettuce, either, and also boast a long tradition of kidnapping their wives.) Sinjar lies at the crossing of several ethnic and sectarian borders in Western Iraq, and the Yezidi's unorthodox customs have made them a perennial target of Sunni, Shia, and Kurd alike. With no militia to guard against pogroms, the Yezidi used to hide out from their persecutors among the Roman ruins that dot the plain below (the Roman Empire's eastern boundary runs through the center of town).

FIRST THE BRITISH AND THEN THE Soviets launched a few archaeological expeditions around Sinjar, but mostly the town has been frozen in amber. Elsewhere in Iraq, kids throw rocks at the Americans. Here, says 1-1 AD's Captain Aaron Dixon, they toss Roman coins. Another soldier claims that this sense of timelessness spooks him a bit. In 2003, an officer with the 101st Airborne Division realized, while watching a DVD copy of *The Exorcist*, that the eerie opening sequence of the 1973 film was shot among the Yezidi temples just outside his door.

WHICH STANDS TO REASON: WHAT truly sets the Yezidi apart from their neighbors is that they worship, well, Satan. Or, more exactly, Malak Taus (the Peacock Angel), whom God sent down to earth to create mankind. "When Satan came to earth, it was his reward," Nasser explains. "That day was beautiful—all the flowers turned red." The Yezidi remain sensitive about this belief. Last year, for example, Yezidi parliamentarian Kameran Khairi Said interrupted a speech by then–Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari, because, he explained, "we feel insulted when you repeatedly use the expression in your speeches and statements, 'God protects us from the Devil.' "

OVER TEA AND CIGARETTES, SINJAR'S elders gather in a dilapidated building, where they confide that Yezidi liturgy contains a prophecy of special relevance to the Americans. In the Yezidi version of the Second Coming, the Rapture is said to arrive in the form of blue-eyed fighters from a distant shore. "A long time ago, we said holy people with red faces and blue eyes will free us," explains Saydow Morad, a municipal leader with robes and a long beard. Gesturing to Dixon, he says, "We are not disappointed." When the discussion turns to his views of the Americans, even Modo—a quick-talking operator who, unlike his robed colleagues, favors Western attire—reverts to the mystical. He explains the Yezidi's attachment to the U.S. occupation this way: "When President Bush said this is a holy fight, we know he is correct. God wanted this to happen." This, he adds in a curious aside, is "why President Bush tells us to fast." Which, apparently, the Yezidi do several days per year.

FOR ALL OF ITS DIVINE ORIGINS, WHEN it comes to the Yezidi's affection for the Americans, it's hard to know where theological enthusiasms end and temporal ones begin. The Americans have poured funds into Sinjar and rebuilt much of the town. "If the Americans leave," Modo says, "the Yezidi will suffer terrible things." That's because everyone in Iraq—Kurds to the North, Arabs to the South, Turkmen to the East—seems to have designs on Sinjar. In the name of "Arabizing" their lands, Saddam Hussein slaughtered thousands of Yezidi around Sinjar, and Yezidi complain that, even now, the Baghdad government seeks to claim them as Arabs. Meanwhile, Sunni leaders accuse the Yezidi of being U.S. puppets, and the charge of collaboration has come to haunt Sinjar. More than anyone else, the Yezidi fear the Kurds. Having been Arabized under Saddam, Sinjar now finds itself under pressure from the Kurdish militia to declare itself Kurdish. At the mere mention of their neighbors to the north, a Yezidi council meeting descends into a Babelesque roar.

AS WE SAY OUR GOODBYES, YEZIDI representative Ali Rasho pulls me aside and thrusts a stack of papers into my hands. It consists of letters addressed to various U.N. commissions and Western human rights organizations, pleading for attention to be paid to the Yezidi. The odds that anyone will read them seem slight. Washington, too, will surely forget about the Yezidi when the Americans depart Iraq, just as it discarded Vietnam's Montagnards—another mountain people who suffered terribly for the sin of aiding the United States.

ASIDE FROM 1-1 AD, IN FACT, KURDISH militiamen and Al Qaeda seem to be the only ones who evince any interest in Sinjar's residents: A few weeks after my visit, bombings engulfed the once-peaceful town. And, a few weeks after that, the soldiers of 1-1 AD received orders to depart Sinjar for Anbar province. From Ramadi, their death notices now appear nearly every day in those tidy boxes inside U.S. newspapers. But the Yezidi still pray for them. As we should pray for the Yezidi.

LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

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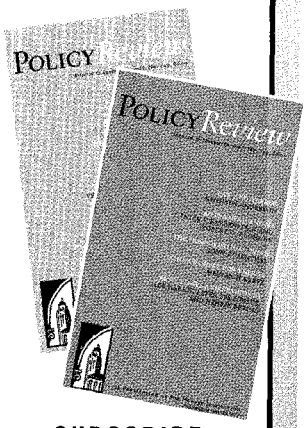

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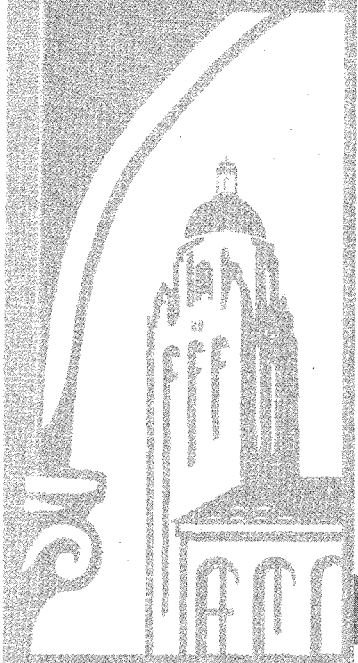

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In the new issue of *Policy Review*

Law and Terror

This is a democracy. Congress must legislate

Two branches of government have been hard at work in the war on terror these past years, even if they have not infrequently worked at cross-purposes. Executive agencies devise a warrantless surveillance program—and a federal judge declares it unconstitutional. Administration officials and federal bureaucrats devise rules for trying accused terrorists in military tribunals—and the *Hamdan* decision sends the tribunal drafters back to the drawing board. But where are the people's elected representatives in all of this? The Supreme Court has said that Congress has an indispensable role to play in establishing democratically legitimate policy in counterterrorism. Democratic theory tells us, moreover, that whatever actions the executive was able to undertake on its own authority in the immediate emergency of 9/11, and indeed whatever inherent powers it might permanently possess, in fact democracy is better off when the political branches work in concert to create a long-term policy. So where is the legislation, passed by Congress and signed into law by the president, on the multiple topics that make up a full and complete counterterrorism policy for the country?

—Kenneth Anderson

Anti-Americanisms

Biases as diverse as the country itself

If a society veers toward secularism, as much of Europe has, American religiosity is likely to become salient—odd, disturbing, and, because of American power, vaguely threatening. How can a people who believe more strongly in the Virgin Birth than in the theory of evolution be trusted to lead an alliance of liberal societies? If a society adopts fervently Islamic religious doctrine and practices, as has occurred throughout much of the Islamic world during the past quarter century, the prominence of women in American society and the vulgarity and emphasis on sexuality that pervade much of American popular culture are likely to evoke loathing, even fear. Thus, anti-Americanism is closely linked to the polyvalence of American society.

—Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Keohane

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